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EVERYTHING YOU EVER NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT SEGA'S CLASSIC ARCADE RACER

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

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DAVID CRANE EXPLAINS THE CREATION OF ONE OF THE NES'S MOST LOVABLE CHARACTERS

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IMAGINE PUBLISHING

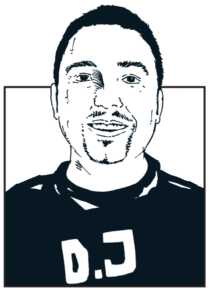
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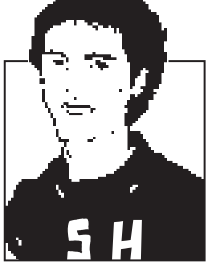
## THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE HEWSON GAME?




### DARRAN JONES

*Cybernoid* on the Amstrad. A fantastic shooter that required amazing dexterity, fast reflexes and proved that the CPC was awesome.
**Expertise:**
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and Retro Gamer
**Currently playing:**
*Monster Hunter Tri*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*




### STUART HUNT

It's a toss-up between *Nebulus* or *Firelord* for me. Given that Stephen Crow was one of the nicest blokes I've interviewed, I'm going for the latter.
**Expertise:**
Games with flying bits in them
**Currently playing:**
*Alan Wake*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Alan Wake*




### JASON KELK

It's slightly obscure, but *Slayer* on the C64 was an excellent scrolling shoot-'em-up for just three quid.
**Expertise:**
Crashing 8-bit computers
**Currently playing:**
*Warhawk* (Atari 8-bit)
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Io*




### CRAIG GRANNELL

It's got to be *Paradroid*, with its intense and atmospheric hunt-and-shoot mechanic, faux-3D overhead view, frantic mini-game and perfect controls.
**Expertise:**
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
**Currently playing:**
Loads of iPad games
**Favourite game of all time:**
*H.E.R.O.*




### DAVID CROOKES

The one I have fondest memories of is *Deliverance: Stormlord II*. Not only did I get it free from *Games X* magazine – remember that? – but it also used to give me blinding headaches. Strange.
**Expertise:** All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
**Currently playing:**
*OutRun*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Broken Sword*




### PAUL DRURY

*Paradroid* and especially the droid-capturing mini-game. I found myself dreaming of logic gates and circuit boards that seemed to stretch for miles.
**Expertise:**
Super Trolley
**Currently playing:**
*WarioWare DIY*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*




### MARTYN CARROLL

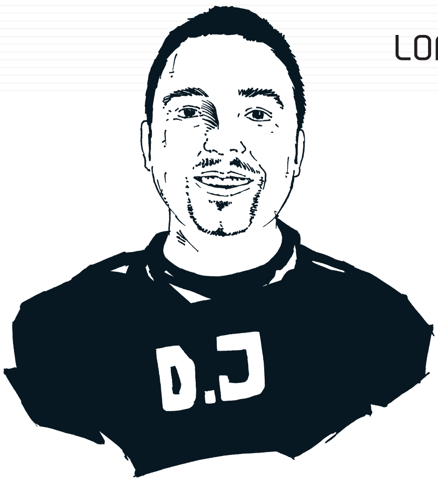
For me Hewson was all about Cecco, and his brace of *Exolon* and *Cybernoid* was pretty hard to beat.
**Expertise:** Sinclair stuff
**Currently playing:**
*Battlefield 1943*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*




### PAUL DAVIES

I remember *Stormlord* being quite a saucy game.
**Expertise:**
Banging my head against a brick wall
**Currently playing:**
*Monster Hunter Tri*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Ghouls 'N Ghosts*

# LOADING...




**When I first saw screenshots of *Prince Of Persia* on the Master System I wondered what all the fuss was about.** I knew of its heritage and I normally trusted *Mean Machines* but, "It just looks so plain and dull," I commented to a friend.

Of course, I'm a compete idiot, and when I finally saw Jordan Mechner's game in motion I was not only forced to eat those previous words, but was made to make up new outlandish statements and eat those too.

Now, Jordan Mechner has gone on to bigger and better things. He's a published screenwriter, overseeing the recently released *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, and has more power than he has ever had. And yet he was more than willing to catch up with us and discuss the origins and continued success of one of gaming's most recognisable platform characters.

Still, if *Prince Of Persia* doesn't do anything for you, you're bound to find something of interest this issue. There's an in-depth look at Sega's *Super Hang-On*, and we go behind the door of Infocom's *Zork* and hang out on the forum to play *Streets Of Rage 2*. There's plenty more, of course, but I'll let you discover it for yourself.

Enjoy the magazine,





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» **Load 77** Breathing new life into classic games

## FEATURED







## RETRO REVIVALS





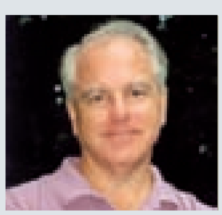




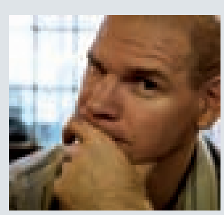

## In the hot seat this month...











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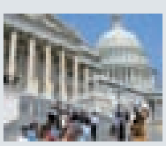






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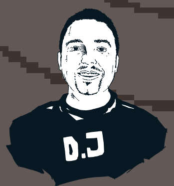
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# retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD




>> We've all sorts of interesting news for you this month. The co-creators of Bionic Commando Rearmed announce a new studio, there's a look at the new Lara Croft game, and Capcom finally reveals that a new instalment of Marvel vs Capcom is on the way. Phew.

## ✱ CONTENTS







» Might and Delight's co-founder and art director, Jakob Tuchten, gives us the lowdown on what the future holds for the studio.

» Many of the team at M&D worked on the *Bionic Commando Rearmed* XBLA project for Capcom.



M to the D

# MIGHT AND MAGIC

## FROM THE TEAM THAT HELPED REARM BIONIC COMMANDO COMES A BRAND NEW STUDIO THAT'S CLEARLY STUCK IN THE PAST

**When Swedish game developer Grin was forced to close its doors last year, we in the Retro Gamer office were left gutted. Following the Swedish developer's excellent work in rebooting Capcom's *Bionic Commando* series, not once, but with two fantastic titles last year, we had the studio down as one to really watch going into the first quarter of 2010.**

But while Grin is sadly no more, two new development houses with strong links to the company have emerged from its ashes. The first to appear was Outbreak Studios last year, founded by Grin lead gameplay programmer Peter Björklund, and the latest is Might and Delight, which comprises several of the Grin staffers that worked on the *Bionic Commando Rearmed* XBLA project, and announced its existence to the gaming press last month.

What had us most excited about M&D, though, was an interesting bit of text at the foot of the company's website (**www.mightanddelight.com**), which reads: "It's no secret that Might and Delight loves retro. We adore the delicate simplicity found in many old games. Our goal is to create experiences that look to the simplicity while providing something fresh and accessible!"

Upon reading this, we immediately contacted M&D to ask if it would be up for a nice chinwag to find out more, and Jakob Tuchten, M&D's co-founder and art director, cordially obliged to our polite demands.

**Can you tell us about the story behind Might and Delight? When was the company formed?**
The idea of M&D was formed long ago, but officially we've been active

> "The link between ideas and production costs led to so many unique and strange games"



## GO DEEPER

>> The founders of Might and Delight are responsible for the excellent *Bionic Commando Rearmed*

>> Jakob Tuchten is a big fan of Capcom's work, stating that he'd love to do a remake of *Little Nemo: The Dream Master*

four months or so. After *Rearmed* I think many of us silently wished that we could work together again. But the team was split up, and I don't think that the thought of leaving Grin and forming something new was ever discussed. After Grin's closure that thought became more relevant. I had already left the company and had pretty much decided to quit making games, but accidents led to some of us meeting up again, and, before we knew it, M&D was formed!

**How sad was it to see Grin close last year, and what wisdom has Might and Delight taken away from that experience?**
Even if it didn't affect me directly, it was extremely sad to see. And exactly what led to Grin's closure depends on who's telling the story. Some of us had already left the company, making it even harder to get a grasp of the situation. I can't really say what to do different. Grin had a lot of positive sides – those we will always try to keep with us.

**It's clear that M&D obviously loves retro games, but what is it you love most about classic games and which retro franchises would you love to work on if the opportunity to do so arose?**
*Little Nemo: The Dream Master* is definitely at the top of my list! But there is so much to love about retro and so many games I wish I could touch. One thing I personally think is so fantastic about old games is that they were so cheap to develop. The relation between ideas and production costs led to the creation of so many unique and strange games. Today the demand on a game's technical level is so strong. And with the expensive productions as a result of that, games need to sell tons of copies to be profitable.

**Following the recent announcement of *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2*, how do you feel about not being asked to continue work on the series?**
*Bionic Commando Rearmed 2* started in Grin and many of us worked on the project in the beginning. But M&D didn't even exist when Capcom and Fatshark [the Swedish company behind *BCR2*] started to collaborate. If the situation would have looked different had we existed at that time is anyone's guess. I think Fatshark are doing a great job, and there are absolutely no hard feelings on our part!

**Are you working on anything at the moment, and, if so, can you tell us anything about the project?**
We are not working on anything – I would really like to announce something but we are simply too fresh for that. We've just now started to talk with some publishers. Things are looking very positive, but to be honest we don't know what direction we are moving in. Either way, I can pretty much guarantee that Might and Delight's first title will be a beautiful visual experience strongly influenced by the simplicity of retro games!

**We heard a rumour that before Grin's closure it was planning to work on an HD remake of *Strider*, similar in style to *Rearmed*. Is there any truth to this?**
[laughs] I've heard that rumour as well. There has been a lot of talk about different possible remakes after *Bionic Commando Rearmed* and I wouldn't be surprised if Capcom was considering *Strider* because of its cult status. What's so strange looking back is that our team didn't get another project right away. *Rearmed* was a super hit but I can't recall hearing anything about continuing on that road, even months after the launch. *

# The RG Roundup

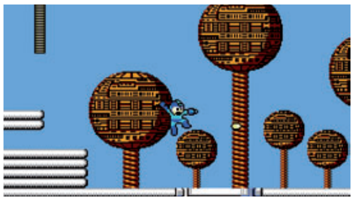
>> The Capcom retro franchises that we'd most like to see rebooted



### Strider
For a time there was some speculation flying around that Darran's ninja boyfriend was to be the next for a good rebooting by Grin. Sadly, Jakob confirmed that the team had heard this rumour too and didn't know this to be fact. Nevertheless, *Strider* is most certainly ripe for an update, in our opinion. Come on, Capcom! Make it happen.



### Little Nemo: The Dream Master
Not surprisingly, on the top of the wish list for Might and Delight to tackle was another resplendent NES action/platformer, namely *Little Nemo: The Dream Master*. Based on a Japanese comic strip and animated film, *Little Nemo* was a gorgeous-looking platform adventure that starred a pyjama-wearing boy battling through his own surreal dreams.



### Mega Man
Given the clear similarities between the two Capcom franchises, we'd love to see Capcom give someone the chance to have a stab at *Mega Man*. We'd do it as a gritty, *Rearmed*-type action platformer. Drop the cutesy visuals and go for something a little more akin to *Contra*, with giant robotic mayors to beat down and impressive firepower to top it off.

## THE RETRO DEBATE

>> What retro franchise would you most like to see return?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

**C=Style**
Just to be a bit different I'd love to see *Midnight Resistance* given the reboot treatment. It's an underrated game with the best soundtrack ever, and with the dual-stick setup we have today the game could now be given the port it truly deserves.

**Rinoa**
Would love to see a *Streets Of Rage* update. I've many fond memories of that game, so it would be great to see some kind of re-release.

**Ralph Milne's Left Foot**
I'll have to go with *Captain Commando*. *Streets Of Rage* has been done a zillion times. Check out the excellent remake floating about the web. So yeah, bring on Mack the Knife!

**Vivid**
An update to *Streets Of Rage* would be most welcome. Other than that, I would really love to see a new *Earthworm Jim*, *Jazz Jackrabbit* and *Wing Commander* – although it really wouldn't be the same without Origin behind everything.

**Antiriad2097**
*Bad Dudes* for me. It has Bad Dudes in it, and Dragon Ninjas. It's cool before you're off the title page.

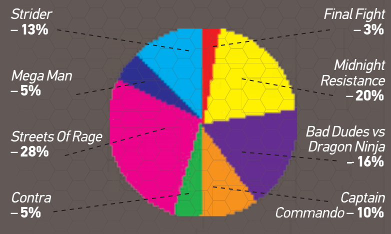
**NonShinyGoose**
*Strider* given the *Bionic Commando Rearmed* treatment could be something very special.

**HalcyonDaze00**
*Streets Of Rage*. The side scrolling beat-'em-up genre has been sadly neglected the last two generations, so it would be great to see *Streets Of Rage* make a comeback.

**ToxieDogg**
I was torn between *Midnight Resistance* and *Dragon Ninja*, so in the end I went with the *Bad Dudes*. Would love to see the story fleshed out a bit more, if nothing else.

**STranger81**
*Bad Dudes vs Dragon Ninja* for me. One of the best arcade games ever made. Hitting ninjas with nunchucks while on a moving lorry never gets old!

## FORUM OPINION
**Most ripe for a reboot?**



# retrocolumns

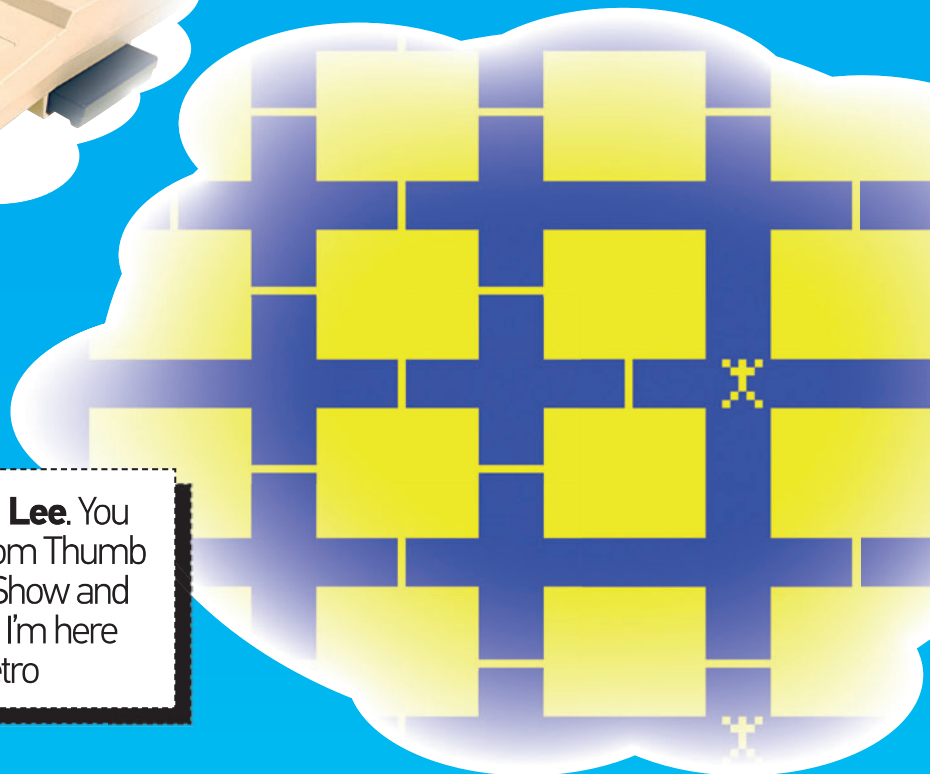
>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

**Here's the bio...**
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.










Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

# Alcatraz

**I am accused by some people close to me of being 'too retro'. When a friend said this to me recently, I took offence and threw a bit of a hissy fit. But sitting here, in a state of semi-Zen, writing my few, brief words for a magazine called Retro Gamer, I think I'm beginning to see his point. I'm in the spare room, surrounded by old computers, listening to a Monkees 45 on my Dansette, having just purchased a CB radio off the internet. None of that really struck me as odd or 'too retro' until just this minute.**

But I think my interests have always been slightly left of centre. Don't worry. I'm not one of those irritating dicks you meet at a party who proudly admits: 'I'm a bit bonkers, me! You got to watch out 'cos even I don't know what I'm gonna do next!' The very fact that they have made this admission means they are as unconventional as a very conventional house brick and they consider a *Simpsons* tie and Tasmanian Devil socks to actually be fashion wear.

But I have always liked things that others could consider niche. One of my favourite games of all time, and the first game I ever got addicted to, was called *Alcatraz* on the Dragon 32. It's an obscure title from the brilliant Microdeal label – I did look up to Cuthbert as some sort of role model. Very simple idea where you had to escape from a prison. Pretty straightforward, and I think I could see, even at the age of nine, that this game was actually pretty pony. It had migraine-inducing sound and strobing graphics that would be banned today by such arbiters of freethinking as the *Daily Mail* for inducing seizures.

Also, it was ridiculously difficult. You had to lure guards towards you, so they would unlock doors, then sneak through and trick another guard. I very rarely made it off the first screen. I think I only got to the third screen once and was so excited that I actually pissed myself and got caught immediately. Despite all this, *Alcatraz* ruled. I would keep going back to it time after time. The thing is, no one I've spoken to has ever heard of it, let alone played it. Did it actually exist? Well, possibly, although I can't be sure. I was Googling it earlier and can find references to *Alcatraz 2*, but very little to do with the original. No screenshots, no pictures of the cover, no reviews… Absolutely nothing. Maybe I've confused the two games and I've been wrong all this time. Who knows?

To be honest, it's probably a good thing I can't find out anything about it. I'm not sure I want to see it again. I mean, despite it being my favourite game, I thought it was a bit crap even then. Who knows what I would think of it today? Sometimes it's best to keep these things as memories. Going back to them isn't always a good idea.

> I'm surrounded by old computers, listening to a Monkees 45 on my Dansette



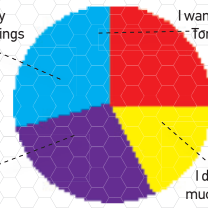


» [Live Arcade] There are plenty of interesting puzzles to break up all the twin-stick blasting.

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

**Are you looking forward to Lara Croft And The Guardian of Light?**




"I fear this will flop severely, jobs will be lost, and any real *TR* will be cancelled/put on hold. Hope not though." – **ismellicecream**

"Couldn't care less – the *Tomb Raider* series is second only to Sonic with its recent tally of worthless sequels" – **gmintyfresh**

"Lara is a victim of her own success….. she should never have performed with U2" – **BennyTheGreek**

LARA CROFT RETURNS, BUT TOMB RAIDING IS NO LONGER ON THE AGENDA

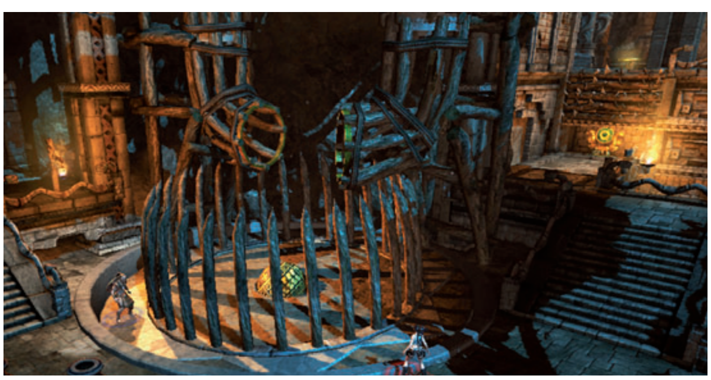
# SAME LARA, BRAND NEW ADVENTURE

**If there's one thing we never expected to see it was Lara Croft in a twin-stick shooter. Yes, it sounds completely crazy, but that's exactly what we were treated to when Square Enix recently showed off *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* to us.**

While it features the same central protagonist, guns and plenty of puzzles to solve, this is a world away from the exploits of traditional *Tomb Raider* games, and is Crystal Dynamics' attempt to take the series in a fresh new direction. It's an attempt that so far appears to be paying off, as this looks set to be a fairly big game for a digital release.

Square Enix is promising at least six hours of entertainment for your first run-through, which certainly stacks up well compared to some retail releases we can think of. There's also the ability to play co-op, with Lara either going it alone or teaming up with new character Totec. With access to both a shield and spears, Totec can handily use his items to allow Lara to reach out-of-the-way places. She can stand on his shield and balance on spears, allowing you to solver the game's many puzzles in a variety of ways.

Lara herself has access to her trusty grappling hook, which not only works as a handy way of scaling higher ledges, but can also act as a tightrope. Play on your tod and Lara must solve puzzles in brand new ways, greatly adding to replayability. Add in plenty of twin-stick goodness – certain areas were swarming with enemies and vicious spiders – and some truly beautiful looking visuals, and Lara's new adventure is beginning to get us very excited indeed.



## MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



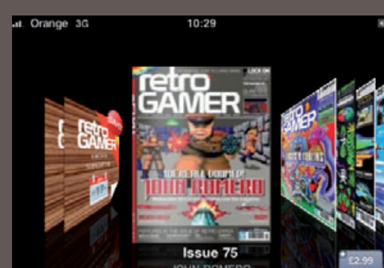

### » Prepare for R3Play

It's a well known fact that you can never have too many gaming events. With this in mind, Gordon Sinclair and Dave Moore who co-hosted last year's excellent Retro Reunited and Acorn World have organised a brand new show that will cover all aspects of gaming. Dubbed R3Play and hosted by Gail Porter it is a brand new event celebrating four decades of gaming history. More info next month, but for the time being head to www.r3play.info to order your tickets.



### » Get Rearmed

In addition to revealing *Marvel Vs Capcom 3*, Capcom also used Captivate to announce a sequel to the brilliant *Bionic Commando Rearmed*. Developed by some of the team behind last year's reboot, *Bionic Commando*, it's already looking mightily impressive and includes a brand new jump button. We've no idea how this will affect the traditional gameplay, but we can't wait to find out.




### » Retro Gamer app

Don't forget that **Retro Gamer** is now available from iTunes and the AppStore for use with the Apple iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. Available to download for just £1.19, future issues can be purchased for a very reasonable £2.99. Back issues as far back as 62 can be downloaded, with additional issues being added all the time. If you're a fan of the magazine then this is the perfect way to always keep it close to you.

**Here's my bio…**
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.




Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years




Fighting Vipers
1995




Mark Of The Wolves
1999




Guardian Heroes
1996

# Limited Edition Miniature Plastic Sword

**Well, I couldn't help myself, could I? I had to own the limited edition *Monster Hunter Tri* big box thingy from Game. Now that I've got it home, I realise that having another big load of cardboard and stickers to hide from my house guests isn't going to help me play the game any better. But I love it. And I know that makes me mad.**

I really can't remember the game that got me started on all this nonsense. Possibly it was because all my BBC games were pirated on TDK C90s, apart from *Zalaga* and *Frak*… and *Pedro* (which was rubbish). I was always envious of my mate who had all the originals, with their brilliant artwork and cassettes with proper logos. And he was never complimentary about my own box inserts, hand-drawn with crayons on school paper.

What probably happened is that, around the age of 12, I made a secret vow to get as much official plastic, paper, and cardboard as possible, as soon as I could afford it. This doesn't quite explain how I ended up with three copies of *Fighting Vipers* for Sega Saturn. That's another story that I should speak to a doctor about. However, I like to think it justified my *Pokémon*-branded Game Boys that were never used because I was scared of spoiling them, and Japanese versions of Capcom games that I couldn't always understand because I hated the US artwork so much.

In order to make myself sound almost human to anyone reading this, I'll try to impress you with where the idea to finally 'fess up came from. It was Laura Marling in *NME*, talking about the future of the album format. She considers sound quality from download files, and how ultimately digital files should sound better than old LPs. But, she says, 'I think artwork is the biggest tragedy – physical artwork is the one that's lost out.' This made me think that it's a good job that I secured two copies of *Gunstar Heroes* on the Mega Drive back in the day (now sitting under my bed, doing nothing).

Don't get the wrong idea. I can't afford to own all this junk. I sold my entire Neo Geo collection including *Mark of the Wolves* a couple of years ago, because even I can see the sense in owning this for a few quid on Xbox LIVE instead of a few hundred quid on a big old cartridge, in a brilliant box, with a cool little white card, that had an interesting smell… no, it's not the same, is it?

So, what have I learned here? Laura Marling is right about the physical artwork stuff; my *Monster Hunter* diary looks great, though of course it'll never get used – unless I'm feeling reckless. It isn't big or clever to buy several versions of the same game, because it only makes you skint, and even your friends think you're an idiot. Finally, my parents should never find out and don't tell my wife!

I can see the sense in owning this for a few quid on Xbox Live instead of a few hundred quid

**What's you favourite arcade fighter?** *Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting*. Our whole office life used to revolve around that thing.

# IT'S ON!

## CAPCOM ANNOUNCES MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3

**There have been rumours for an absolute age now, but Capcom finally revealed the next part of its '*Versus*' franchise: *Marvel vs Capcom 3: Fate Of Two Worlds.***

In typical Capcom style, very little has been given away in its debut trailer, revealed at this year's Captivate show, but it still manages to look exciting as hell. It kicks off with a bout between Wolverine and Ryu and switches to an aerial encounter between Iron Man and Morrigan, before finishing with a skirmish between the Hulk and Chris Redfield.

In addition to the six revealed characters, ten additional pugilists are shadowed out, equally representing both the Marvel and Capcom universes. While Capcom is obviously refusing to tell who these characters might be, *Devil May Cry*'s Dante, *Dead Rising*'s Frank West and Chun-Li are looking extremely likely. As for the Marvel characters… Well, the only ones we appear to recognise are Deadpool and Thor, but that's more down to our general lack of knowledge – we only ever play as Spider-Man – than anything else.



» So far Chris Redfield is the only new Capcom character to be announced. He looks bloody good as well.

While Capcom hasn't revealed how many fighters will be available in the final game, we're guessing that it is going to get as close to the original *Marvel vs Capcom 2* roster as possible. After all, after the huge number of fighters available in that, anything else would be seen as a massive disappointment.



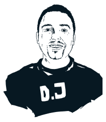
What we do know is that *Marvel vs Capcom 3* will not be using the engine that powers *Street Fighter IV*, but will instead use the MT Framework that was put to great use in *Dead Rising*, *Resident Evil 5* and *Lost Planet*.

It's also looking a little more serious than *Street Fighter IV*, if the included artwork is anything to go by, although Capcom is promising all the trademarks of the series, including three-on-three fighting and accessibility. Headed by Ryota Niitsuma, the producer of the excellent *Tatsunoko vs Capcom*, we're already tremendously excited about another new brawler to get stuck into.

Our only concern at the moment is that Capcom will rely too heavily on previous characters, rather than the many introduced in the decade since *Marvel vs Capcom 2*. Still, as long as Strider makes the final cut, we should be able to weather anything. *

## * WHAT WE THINK

### Darran




I'm hyped for this. *Marvel vs Capcom* has always been my favourite in the series, and I can't wait for this iteration. The video with Chris Redfield shows that Capcom is updating the roster, so I'm excited to see what gets revealed next.

### Stuart




Though the trailer gives very little away, I'm still very much looking forward to this. *Tatsunoko vs Capcom* was great, so I'm not surprised that Capcom has entrusted him to manage its latest Marvel crossover game.

### David




If I'm being honest, fighting games have never really been my bag, but *Marvel vs Capcom* intrigued me. Spider-Man scrapping with Ryu? Cool. Roll on next March. Spider-Man may not be confirmed yet, but this game has me in its web.



# WHAT IF?

## Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

### Subject No 11
## Super Street Fighter IV

THE AMSTRAD WASN'T exactly cutting-edge when it came to fighters. In fact, we can probably count the genuinely decent brawlers on a single hand. We love to dream, though, and one of our favourite daydreams at the moment is to imagine what *Super Street Fighter IV* would have looked like 20 years ago. We're betting that Capcom would borrow the graphic engine from the game *Bob Winner*. Of course, it would have probably played like arse…






» [CPC] How do you perform a Spinning Bird Kick without a kick button?

# Retro Booty

## TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP







### Super Mario Sound Effect Keychain

■ **RRP:** £5.99 Free Delivery
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com

A great prank to play on your mates; purchase one of these keychains and, while they're asleep, play around with the buttons. Then just sit back and listen to their nonsensical sleep conversations with Mario, or maybe just laugh at their reactions to the familiar din of Mario swallowing a growth mushroom - hours of entertainment for a few quid.

### Raging Demon Tee

■ **RRP:** £14.95 ■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Akuma's (or Gouki) signature Raging Demon special attack (or Shun Goko Satsu), which translates as Instant Hell Murder (or not nice to be on the receiving end of) is one of the most devastating attacks in the *Street Fighter* series. This T-shirt champions the devastating finisher with the words 'Shun Goko Satsu' and the move's control inputs in blood red.

## TREASURE OF THE MONTH

### Limited Edition Streets Of Rage Sega Mega Drive Console

■ **RRP:** £28.99 Free Delivery
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com

We think these Mega Drive consoles from Blaze serve as great little travel consoles, or even neat retro consoles for young gamers - especially as you can pick up additional games for it dirt cheap from car boots. Saying that, you could argue that it's possible to snap up a Mega Drive for a few quid too. However, this one does come with 10 built-in games, including the MD version of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Streets Or Rage*, plays games from any region, and is roughly the size of an ashtray. It's also quite a bit cheaper than the machines initially retailed for. For what they are – essentially a TV-Plug in games that offers far more longevity and choice – we think at their new reduced price point they are certainly worth picking up.





## Pac-Man MP3 Player Case

■ **RRP:** $9.99 (approx £6.70)
■ **Buy it from:** www.clubnamco.com

This is just one of those products Pac-Man was born to merchandise. It is, of course, a black leather iPod case that turns the gadget's control disc into the infamous yellow ghostbuster – though we suspect the triangular mouth bit is probably is a bit annoying when wanting to scroll through your song listings and crank the volume up. Never mind, eh?






## Stainless Steel Crowbar Bottle Opener

■ **RRP:** $19.99 (approx £14)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Looking for the perfect gift for the beer-drinking *Half-Life* fan in your life? Then you might want to order them one of these stainless steel *Half-Life 2* crowbars (which could theoretically be used to kill one of those plushie Headcrabs we featured last month). It will allow them to look effortlessly cool when opening a crate of beer with a big crowd of people watching.

## Namco Dioramas

■ **RRP:** $7.50 (approx £5) ■ **Buy it from:** www.ncsxshop.com

Here's something different – dot graphic dioramas based upon some of Namco's most well-loved classic arcade titles. The games selected by Namco for mini-immortalisation include *Xevious*, *Rally X*, *Galaxian*, *Dig Dug* and *Druaga*, and each figurine features a stage modelled on a section of the game with character sprites to decorate them with. They even play music too.




## Sonic The Hedgehog / Body (Brown – T-Shirt)

■ **RRP:** £11.99 Free Delivery
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Our favourite T-shirts are the ones that we can picture ourselves getting buried in when we eventually kick the bucket – which we hope will be to *Scarface*, with us going out in a blaze of glory that ends with us falling into a water feature. We think that this is by far one of the more inventive Sonic tees to have graced these hallowed pages, as it allows you to parade around your local high-street looking like Sega's rapid mascot. Blue face and spines not supplied.

## TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



**01** Gauntlet
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



**02** Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



**03** Text Adventure
■ **RRP:** $14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com




**04** Coexist T-Shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



**05** Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

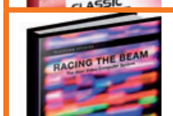
## TOP FIVE BOOKS




**01** Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



**02** Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
■ **RRP:** £8.99 ■ **Publisher:** Random House
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk




**03** Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk




**04** Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk




**05** Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

## TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



**01** Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £9)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



**02** Tabletop Arcade Machine
■ **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
■ **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
■ **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



**03** Space Invaders TV Game
■ **RRP:** £9.99 ■ **Manufacturer:** Radica
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com



**04** Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



**05** Space Invaders Clock
■ **RRP:** $80 (approx £50)
■ **Manufacturer:** Taito
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



## A MOMENT WITH...

# Ste Pickford

We put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes meets Ste Pickford, half of the legendary Pickford Brothers

### Who is Ste Pickford?

Ste's first collaboration with brother John came with *Zub*, and the pair soon left Binary Design to set up Zippo Games. That company became Rare Manchester in 1990, and later the Pickfords moved to Software Creations. Today, the brothers run *Naked War* developer Zee-3.

**Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?**
I think the games I've made have got better and better over the years, so much so that I don't really like many of the older ones very much. *Plok* on the SNES still stands up, and parts of *Equinox* (the dungeons) are okay, and I guess *Wetrix* on the N64 still plays pretty well. I'm most proud of *Naked War* and *Magnetic Billiards* - the two games John and I have made as indies.

**What is your proudest memory?**
I'm not sure I've had anything happen yet to make me really proud! Most of my memories are slight disappointments… I think the very first time we got a Crash Smash (for *Glider Rider*) was a stand-out moment, when I was still a teenager.

**What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?**
Oh, always publisher interference. Having to make a game worse than it should be… or because the person signing the cheques at the publisher has some dumb ideas. That's been a constant frustration.

**Which industry veteran do you admire?**
Oh dear, there are so many! I think I most admire the people who are still going and still making games today.

**How would you like your games to be remembered?**
That's a tough question, as I don't think we've made our best games yet. Before going indie, we spent most of our career being thwarted by publishers and licensors, who stopped us making the good games we knew we were capable of making.

**Which game do you wish you'd made?**
Haha, anything that was a big hit! I wish I'd had just one hit game, back in the 8-bit or 16-bit days, and therefore a bit of money in the bank so I'd be able to crack on with new game ideas without worrying about paying the gas bill.

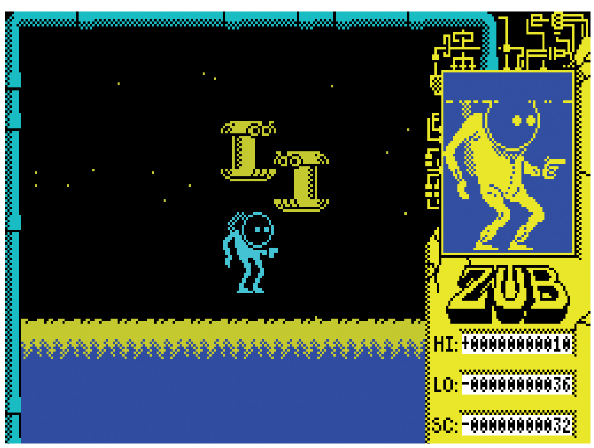
> "I'm constantly learning new techniques and pushing myself"




» [Amstrad] *Ghosts 'n Goblins* was Ste Pickford's first paid work. He produced the graphics while still at school.




» [PC] Ste Pickford still produces games today, having worked on *Naked War*. His company – run with John – is Zee-3.




**What opportunities has making videogames given you?**
Hmm… I'm constantly learning new techniques and pushing myself, and never doing the same task for more than a couple of weeks… as someone who's always worked in small teams making games with just one or two others, I love the varied nature of the work.

**What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?**
Probably the last days of our studio Zed Two, around 2002/2003. After running profitably for about six or seven years, we finally had two big contracts with two different clients, which was supposed to be our protection against either one of them not paying and taking the studio down. Then, both publishers went bust.

**And your best?**
I was probably happiest when I finished *Ken Griffey Jnr* on the SNES, which I was lead artist on. It was the first time NOA had ever contracted a third-party developer to write a game from scratch, and we did it on time, under budget, and made a great job of the project.

**How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?**
I think the mainstream games industry has become far too focused on the biggest hits – it's like five-million-plus sellers or nothing at the moment, which is crazy.

28 May – 24 June

# retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present

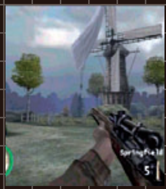
## 30 May 1952
■ Standard Games, a coin-op amusement supplier to US military bases, was renamed Service Games of Japan. In 1965, it was shortened to Sega…



## 1 June 1981
■ Texas Instruments announced its latest home micro, the TI99/4a, with a retail price of $525.



## 5 June 1977
■ Apple Computer Inc released the Apple II computer in the USA. Time to dust off your *Ultima* disks and the *Zork* adventures…



## 7 June 2002
■ *Medal Of Honor: Frontline* is released in the UK on Playstation 2. Lieutenant Jimmy Patterson, we salute you (*sniff*)…

## 15 – 17 June 2010
■ The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) takes place at the Los Angeles Convention Centre in the US of A.




## 11 June 2010
■ *Super Mario Galaxy 2* for the Nintendo Wii is pencilled in for release in Europe and the UK. We can't wait.




## 8 June 2004
■ *Sabre Wulf* by Rare makes a welcome return on the Game Boy Advance. The game contained several references to the Ultimate days.



## 8 June 1984
■ Ultimate released *Sabre Wulf* on the Spectrum. The colourful 2D exploration game also introduced us to Sabreman.




## 17 June 2010
■ *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* is due to be released across Europe on the PSP, and is apparently rather magnificent.



## 18 June 1981
■ The Commodore Pet Show in London was the place to be to see the first UK appearance of the Commodore VIC-20.



## 19 June 1981
■ Nintendo released *Parachute*, the first in the series of their popular Wide Screen Game & Watch handheld games.

## 19 June 1992
■ Treasure Co. Ltd, the games development company behind *Gunstar Heroes* and *Radiant Silvergun*, is formed.




## 22 June 2001
■ Nintendo's newly updated Game Boy handheld, the Game Boy Advance, hits the streets of the UK.



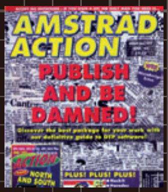
## 21 June 1984
■ Amstrad's first home micro, the CPC464, goes on sale in the UK.




## 20 June 1983
■ Mail order firm Crash Micro Games Action began trading with an eight-page catalogue. It later grew into Newsfield's *Crash* magazine.




## 20 June 1983
■ Enigmatic software house, Ultimate Play The Game, released its very first computer game – the legendary *Jet Pac* on Spectrum.



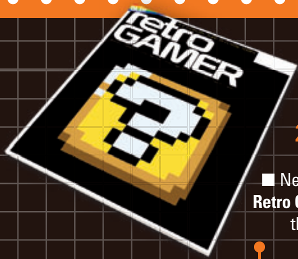

## 22 June 1995
■ Issue 118 of *Amstrad Action* was due out in newsagents. It never appeared, leaving issue 117 to be the very last…



## 23 June 1996
■ Japan becomes the first place to see the new Nintendo console, the N64.



## 23 June 2006
■ Nintendo releases its sleeker, lighter version of the Nintendo DS handheld, the DS Lite, across Europe.




## 24 June 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

# BACK TO THE EIGHTIES




» [Commodore 64] *Rambo 3* was a mishmash of different games that didn't quite come off.

» [Spectrum] The conversion of hapless ski-jumper to computer game was so realistic, you spent most of the time on your arse.



» [PC Engine] Prepare to suffer extreme windypops… *R-Type* on the PC Engine was coming and it looked to be awesome.



# THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1988

**JUNE 1988 – Amiga slashed, Acti revisioned. Start your PC-Engines for a new R-Type of game, as Road Blasters takes on Fire & Forget, Eddie jumps and Ultimate bows out. Richard Burton dons his pith helmet and goes amulet hunting…**

**There was good news for Amiga watchers, with news that the A500 was to lower its price by £100, to £399. The price-cut coincided with the 11th Commodore Show at the Novotel in London, and Commodore's insistence that the Amiga would be the must-have system for Christmas 1988. With price drops like that, who would argue?**

Activision, the American games developer, decided that a corporate name change was in order to reflect the more diverse direction the company was heading. Having branched into other areas of software development including business applications, it was felt the name change to Mediagenic would represent the company more accurately.

The problem was everyone knew who Activision was and what it did, while Mediagenic sounded like a cheap floppy disk brand you might find in a pound shop… a strange move indeed.

The Activision name would not die, however, as the Mediagenic holding company would retain the Activision name for publishing videogames. A sudden bout of common sense prevailed in December 1992, when the name was changed back. Mediagenic had suffered bankruptcy, was then taken over, and finally emerged from said bankruptcy with a need to succeed in the videogame market once again, concentrating solely on game development.

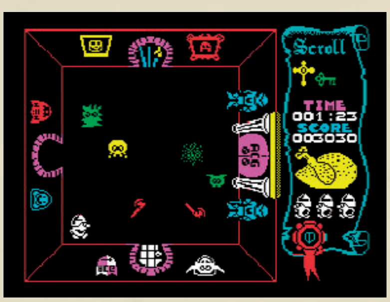
Two big movie-licensed games were in development, and both the companies behind them were promising big things. Domark announced it was to release the follow-up to its original *Star Wars* game, with *The Empire Strikes Back* on the Amstrad, Spectrum, C64, ST and Amiga within a few weeks.

It featured yet more vector graphics (as seen in the first game) but with a new colour palette and a testing selection of levels, including flying an AT-AT-destroying Snowspeeder. It wasn't a great advance technically from Domark's original *Star Wars* game, but it was certainly a competent conversion of the arcade game.

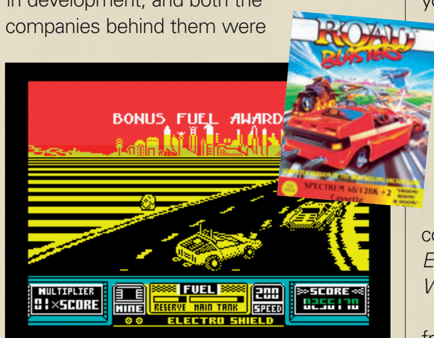
Ocean, on the other hand, was proudly pushing *Rambo III* as its next great movie conversion. As per the newly released movie, you had to go to Afghanistan to save your former Colonel from the hands of the Russian army. You got to shoot stuff – lots of stuff – shoot it a bit more, run around and shoot it all over again.

The final *Rambo III* games produced a mixed bag of conversions with some great offerings (Amstrad and MSX) and not so great (Amiga). Kudos to the programmers though, for attempting to combine gameplay elements of *Into The Eagles Nest*, *Commando* and *Operation Wolf* in one package.

*R-Type*, the side-scrolling shoot-'em-up from Irem, was at last being converted to several home micros. It was licensed to Electric Dreams and developed by Software

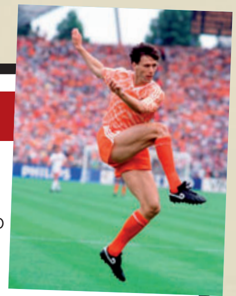



» [Spectrum] Ultimate's magnum opus, *The Collected Works*, was almost its entire Speccy output. Worth a few quid on eBay too…




» [Spectrum] *Road Blasters* and *Fire and Forget*, similar games in more ways than one – they were both very average.

## JUNE 1988 NEWS



» Van Basten in mid-volley scoring a wonder goal against the Soviets… and it wasn't done on *Pro Evo* either…

25 June saw the death of Hillel Slovak at the age of 26. The original guitarist and a founder member of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Slovak became addicted to heroin early in his music career. He attempted to break the habit during the band's European tour but, on his return to the US, succumbed to the addiction. He died of a heroin overdose shortly afterwards. The band wrote 'My Lovely Man' in his memory.



» Hillel Slovak; Red Hot Chili Pepper's founding member lost to heroin. Not good.

25 June saw Holland defeat the Soviet Union at the Euro 88 football championships. A looping volley from Marco Van Basten completed a 2-0 victory for the Dutch.

England were also participating, but only in a supporting role after losing all three group matches; one to the Republic of Ireland and two 3-1 defeats to both the finalists.

22 June saw the world premiere of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*. The mix of live action and animation starred many of cartoons' biggest names, such as Bugs Bunny and Mickey Mouse (the only time the two characters had appeared in the same movie/cartoon), and proved to be a big hit with cinemagoers. This was helped in no small part by the curves of Jessica Rabbit, voiced by Kathleen Turner.

Studios, which also produced all Activision's output for sale outside the USA.

The Spectrum, C64 and Atari ST conversions were well underway and progressing nicely, with an autumn release due, but the version that would cause your eyeballs to pop out of their sockets and spontaneously combust was going to be the conversion for the PC Engine.

You would, however, have to wait until mid-1989 for both the release of *R-Type* on the PC-Engine and the UK release of the PC-Engine itself. Unfortunately, the console never got an official release in the UK, so importers became the main source of all your cream PC-Engine gaming goodness.

There was an impending duel looming between the racing/shoot-'em-up pairing of *Fire & Forget* and *Road Blasters*, published by Titus and US Gold respectively. Both had cars, both cars had guns, and both were pretty much destined for the bargain bin.

The official conversion of the Atari arcade game *Road Blasters* just managed to win out over *Fire & Forget* on most systems it was released on in the game-play and graphical stakes, but both titles were seriously lacking any soul and were best avoided.









» [Spectrum] Part platform, part shoot-em-up and part adventure, *Bionic Commando* proved to be, on the most part, excellent.

French software house Loriciels obviously knew a winner when it saw one, announcing a deal to produce a skiing game in response to the terrific following Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards had acquired at the Winter Olympics held in Calgary, Canada.

*Eddie Edwards Super Ski* was duly produced for the big 8 and 16-bit systems. It featured different skiing disciplines but fittingly, in the style of Eddie himself, failed dismally. At least planting your face into a ski jump at speed would be painless…

Ultimate Play The Game's final Spectrum swan song was to be a compilation entitled *The Collected Works* featuring virtually all their output on the Spectrum. Every one of the eleven titles on the compilation was excellent, though *Underwurlde* never made the final release due to compatibility issues with the Spectrum 128K.

*Crash* had Smashed a trio of Spectrum games this month with *Earthlight* (Firebird), *Bionic Commando* (US Gold/Go!) and *VENOM Strikes Back* (Gremlin Graphics) picking up the honours.

Its sister magazine, *Zzap!* had a threadbare selection of award-winners, with top marks going to *Impossible Mission II* (US Gold), while the sole Sizzler was *Alien Syndrome* (The Edge). There were two Silver Medals doled out for top -ating budget games with *Draconus* (Zeppelin) and *Train Robbers* (Firebird) feeling the *Zzap!* love.

*Amstrad Action* was also skimping on the badges of honour mustering a measly three. The *AA* reviewers concurred with the other magazines that *Impossible Mission II* and *VENOM Strikes Back* were worth of AA Rave status. However, the top prize of Mastergame status was held back for Hewson's colourful and original tower-scaling game, *Nebulus*.

## THIS MONTH IN…





### ACE

Cover tapes and their contents were always dubious quality; full of demos but not a lot of substance. Long before the days of the wafer-thin magazine complete with two tapes containing twelve games came *ACE* and its complete version of Epyx/US Gold's *Impossible Mission*. Nice.





### COMPUTING WITH THE AMSTRAD





*CWTA* ran its rule over a selection of controllers, from a *Terminator* hand grenade-styled contraption to the Cheetah 125+ joystick. Oddly they plumped for the Konix Speedking, which won in lieu of anything representing the Quickshot range.









### ZZAP!64

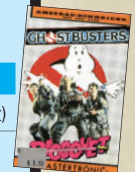
Newsfield was once again dipping its toes into non-gaming magazine territory with multi-page adverts for its newest title, *Fear*, targeting the world of fantasy and horror with short stories, video and book reviews. It would arrive on 16 June 1988 – would it be another *LM*?





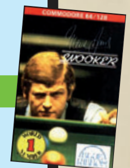
## CHARTS

### JUNE 1988



#### AMSTRAD

1 Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
2 Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
3 The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Ricochet)
4 Trap Door (Alternative)
5 Pro Ski Simulator (Codemasters)



#### COMMODORE 64

1 Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)
2 Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
3 We Are The Champions (Ocean)
4 Target: Renegade (Ocean)
5 Pac-Land (Quicksilva)



#### AMIGA

1 Obliterator (Psygnosis)
2 Ferrari Formula One (Electronic Arts)
3 Sidewinder (Mastertronic)
4 Xenon (Melbourne House)
5 Bubble Bobble (Firebird)

#### MUSIC

1 I Owe You Nothing (Bros)
2 Doctorin' The Tardis (Timelords)
3 With A Little Help From My Friends (Wet Wet Wet/Billy Bragg)
4 Boys (Summertime Love) – Sabrina
5 Got To Be Certain (Kylie Minogue)



# BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [SNES] More animal-based platform fluff and nonsense with *Mr Nutz*. Thankfully, this was one of the better offerings.

## CHARTS




### DEC 1992

**SNES**

1 Street Fighter 2 (Capcom)
2 Super Probotector (Konami)
3 Zelda: A Link To The Past (Nintendo)
4 Super Adventure Island (Hudson Soft)
5 The Addams Family (Ocean)

» [SNES] Forget your Wii family orientated games; gather around for multi-player Super Bomberman. Simplistic yet fantastic.






# THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1992

**DECEMBER 1992 – Gamesmaster Vs Bad Influence, Super Bomberman arrives, not so Super Shadow Of The Beast doesn't whilst Mr Nutz, Bubsy and Rolo go platform head to head to trunk. Richard Burton grabs his yarn and knits himself a Neo Geo…**

**A new magazine arrival this month was *Gamesmaster* by Future Publishing. The multi-format magazine was an accompaniment to the television series of the same name. It contained the usual news, reviews and tips, while keeping you up to date with the latest news from the show. Weighing in at an impressive 148 pages for its debut issue, it immediately became a hit and it still survives to this day.**

Future had reportedly printed 350,000 copies, with many destined for the Gamesmaster Live event being held at the NEC Birmingham on the 4 - 6 December and featuring the fresh-faced but filthy-minded Dominik Diamond. Complimentary magazine, anyone?



» [SNES] The wool-gathering bobcat was just one of many cute platform games due out, and was fairly well-received too.

Rival gaming TV show *Bad Influence* also had magazine ambitions, and quietly released the first issue of its official magazine, published by Europress Interactive. The first issue was a mammoth 196-page affair, and was stuffed solid with gaming content, plus updates and behind-the-scenes features about the programme. It also had plenty of pictures of Violet Berlin (which was nice) but also Andy Crane (which was not so nice).

Strangely, after one further issue it was dropped becoming the shortest run for a British videogames magazine.

Newly released to the handheld console market this month was the Supervision. Marketed by Quickshot, they of the joysticks, the Supervision was a diminutive system with a 2.5-inch square screen displaying four shades of grey, and was being marketed as a direct competitor to the Game Boy. In fact, the Taiwanese version of the Supervision, produced by Watara, looked uncannily like a Game Boy. Predictably, the it had pretty much no effect on Game Boy sales, even though its entry point was just £39.99. With almost all the software produced being simplistic, generic games by companies nobody had heard of, it didn't take long for the Supervision to fade away.




» The Supervision barely made an impression in the UK, although Electronics Boutique often used them as high-tech door wedges.

Ocean Software revealed a brand new character for a *Sonic*-like platform game it was planning to release in early 1993. *Mr Nutz* was a squirrel travelling through colourful exotic looking levels including clouds, volcano and snow en route to defeat the heinous Yeti who plans to freeze the world.

The game may not have been the most original but it was certainly a highly polished product helped in no small part by the team at Ocean France whose reputations for creating graphically superb games remained intact. It was also quite playable too.

It eventually surfaced on the Mega Drive, SNES and Game Boy handhelds just before Christmas '93 and would've certainly been more welcome than a sockful of satsumas come Christmas morning…

There was further fluffy platform gaming, this time on the Mega Drive, in the form of *Bubsy The Bobcat: Claws Encounters Of The*







### GAME BOY

1. Super Mario Land (Nintendo)
2. Batman (Konami)
3. Home Alone (THQ)
4. Hook (Ocean )
5. Bart Simpson's Escape From Camp Deadly (Acclaim)

### MEGA DRIVE

1. European Club Soccer (Virgin Games)
2. Aliens 3 (Arena Entertainment)
3. Taz-Mania (Sega)
4. The Terminator (Virgin Games)
5. Dragon's Fury (Technosoft)

### MUSIC

1. I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
2. Heal The World (Michael Jackson)
3. Would I Lie To You? (Charles & Eddie)
4. Slam Jam (WWF Superstars)
5. Could It Be Magic (Take That)

*Furred Kind*, published by Accolade. The narrative to the game was bizarre; Bubsy has to stop the Woolies (a race of wool stealing aliens, and not ex-employees from everyone's favourite pick-and-mix emporium) who have stolen the entire world's supply of yarn including Bubsy's own personal collection. Bubsy is irked and sets out to get it all back.

Once again, though, the game proved to be an excellent addition to the genre (really? - Ed) and, although the Bubsy character never caught the imagination of the gaming public quite like Sonic had, the game proved successful enough for further conversions and sequels to be spawned.

There was one further entrant into this seemingly endless supply of anthropomorphic platform games, with the lesser-known offering of *Rolo To The Rescue* by Electronic Arts. This Mega Drive game followed the same recipe as the others; a cute main character (this time an elephant), pretty graphics and testing gameplay. However, Rolo had no save function and some long, complex levels, and as such it became exasperating to play.



» [SNES] Often overlooked, *Axelay* had alternate vertical and horizontal levels and some remarkable end of level bosses.

Hudsonsoft had plans to finally introduce its hit *Bomberman* series to the SNES with *Super Bomberman*. It would prove to be a huge hit, and eminently playable with its story mode and battle mode, and would lead onto a further five SNES *Bomberman* games over the next five years.

Psygnosis finally revealed what their first title for the SNES would be and, unsurprisingly, it was to be *Super Shadow Of The Beast*. A bigger and bolder version of the Amiga favourite, the Super version promised lots of good things with the



» [Mega Drive] No save game feature meant you had to complete it in one sitting… and it was hard as nails…

vibes emanating from Psygnosis backing this up. So where did it go wrong? *Super Shadow Of The Beast* was never released (although a finished, release-ready version of the game does exist). In all likelihood, the game was pulled just prior to release by Psygnosis, just as the company was being taken over by Sony – which presumably wouldn't want games like this finding their way onto rival systems.

The finished product eventually found its way onto the internet and, disappointingly, when played was found to be absolute pap compared to the much-loved Amiga version. So perhaps it was actually pulled for being really quite crap.

There were better games on offer in *Sega Force*, as it road-tested an array of titles with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* (Sega, Mega Drive, Master System & Game Gear), *Lemmings* (Sega, Master System & Game Gear), *LHX Attack Chopper* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive) and *Chuck Rock* (Virgin, Game Gear) attainted inner enlightenment and a big sticker stating '*Sega Force* Smash'.

The SNES magazine *Superplay* had no gimmicky awards to give out, just cold hard percentage points, and the higher-scoring games tested by their easy-to-please reviewers were; *Axelay* (Konami), *Rampart* (Electronic Arts), *Soul Blazer* (Enix), *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* (Nintendo), *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (Capcom), *Super Probotector* (Konami), *Populous* (Imagineer), *Actraiser* (Enix), *Super Mario World* (Nintendo), *Lemmings* (Capcom) and *Turtles IV: Turtles In Time* (Jaleco). Cowabunga dudes, et cetera…

## DECEMBER 1992 NEWS



» The one thing Her Royal Highness didn't want for Christmas was an Annus Horribilus due to too much eggnog…

23 December saw a British tradition leaked to a red top newspaper. The Sun, obtained the full transcript of the forthcoming Queen's Speech.

It had been a particularly difficult year for the Queen, with a major fire at Windsor Castle, Princess Anne getting divorced and both sons suffering marriage break-ups, the latest of which became known on 9 December, with Charles and Diana publicly announcing their separation.

Interest in the speech was unprecedented, but it would eventually be remembered for two words rather than the news leak – the Queen's much-borrowed quote of having an "Annus Horribilus" – that's 'terrible year' in Latin and not a symptom of eating too many peacock burgers…

3 December saw the Greek oil tanker, the Aegean Sea, wrecked in poor visibility in the port of La Coruña in north-western Spain. It spilt over 70,000 tons of oil and caught fire, creating a wall of flame over 150 feet tall.

24 December saw the death of Belgian artist Pierre Culliford, also known as Peyo, responsible for bringing the magic of *The Smurfs* to the world. He died of a heart attack on Christmas Eve, aged 64.



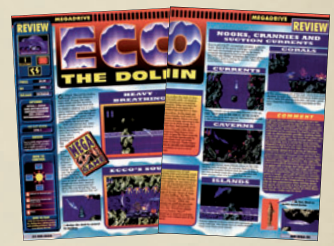
» Pierre Culliford, creator of *The Smurfs*, dies. Ironic then that the Grim Reaper should turn out to be a Smurf too…

## THIS MONTH IN…

### MEAN MACHINES SEGA



Winning over legions of gamers was *Ecco The Dolphin*. This highly original release had a soothing ambient soundtrack and was deemed by many as the Mega Drive game of the year – quite something, considering *Sonic 2* was also released.



### THE ONE AMIGA



Another instalment of Andrew Braybrook's *Uridium 2* developer diary sees Andrew ponder whether to add a dual player mode rather than sticking to the single-player option. The thought germinates and quickly becomes reality…



### N-FORCE



*N-Force* asked if there was still life in the aging NES. Most developers and gamers thought there was but the sticking point for many was the price of new NES games (£30-£40 each). Not good when the console itself was only £59.



READER'S REVIVAL

# The Three Stooges

NYUK-NYUK-NYUK!

#25



» NES
» ACTIVISION
» 1989

**Movie and television adaptations have been a steady source of gaming titles for many years, and only recently has this trend reversed itself in such a way that our favourite games are now becoming movies.** Rarely, though, does a game come out based upon the 'shorts' that used to precede a movie way back when. So this brings us to our game of discussion: *The Three Stooges*. Here Larry, Moe and Curly are tasked (as a result of their own kindness) with performing odd jobs (in the form of mini-games) to raise enough money to pay off the orphanage's mortgage and, if enough money is made, make the necessary repairs to fix the place up.

Jobs are selected via a kind of Press Your Luck-style process where 'Big Money' and 'Whammy' is replaced with job openings and mousetraps, and landing on a mousetrap causes the loss of a digit. Five mousetrap snaps and you have to face the banker, but have enough money and you win. If you're short, well… there goes the orphanage. Land on one of several jobs or contests and all sorts of stupidity ensues. Mini-games (jobs/contests) include doctors, waiters, boxing, trivia and a chowder-eating contest. Bonus spaces also exist in the form of free money, the banker and a slap-a-thon. While the game is quite repetitive in nature (you'll have to perform the same jobs over and over again), certain little moments exist that make this game worth coming back to after a hiatus. The game's opening, digitised voice, memorable movie photos and funny sounds (slaps, eye pokes etc) all come together to provide a memorable experience for the gamer. While this game is not a exactly a gem, it does qualify as a good old-fashioned coffee-break game. Nyuk-Nyuk-Nyuk.




## RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** ROB MESCOLOTTO
» **JOINED:** 27 JANUARY 2010
» **LOCATION:** WASHINGTON DC
» **OCCUPATION:** CONTRACTOR
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** NES

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

# A Prince Among



Jordan Mechner was 21 when he created Prince Of Persia. Now, 21 years after the original and in the year that a blockbuster movie has been made, **David Crookes** talks to the man who created a prince

**Jordan Mechner was once hailed as the king of the platform game. Having created *Prince Of Persia* in 1989, he was bestowed with this most fitting of crowns almost immediately as players fell to their knees in deference to the fluid movement of the main character and doffed their caps to level design that was sometimes frustrating but always fun.**

And today? Mechner looks back on a franchise that has stood him well for more than 20 years, and he is happy. Happy that people have taken this most royal of games to their hearts and ecstatic that he has realised a boyhood dream. And yet it could have been so different. After Mechner had created the first game for the Apple II computer, and after he had seen it ported to almost every machine under the sun, he considered abandoning gaming and following his heart as a filmmaker.

The lure of gaming – and the difficulty in forging a career in the movies – ensured that he continued to produce games, and he had a strong leading role in not just the sequel but the first game of the much-applauded last-generation reboot. That, however, has led him to his personal holy grail, for it is now that he is treading the red carpet, his screenplay for the film version of *Prince Of Persia* having been accepted by Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer. The film was given a release date of 28 May 2010, and Mechner's feet have barely touched the ground since. Hell, it has even given him the chance to take his graphic novels based on the franchise straight into the mainstream.

"I love writing movies, I love making games and writing graphic novels," he tells us. "I'd hate to have to choose among them, and I'm really happy and grateful that *Prince Of Persia* has given me the chance to have a role in creating all three."

But let us go back in time to the moments before Mechner began programming the very first *Prince Of Persia* game. He had spent time producing an action romp called *Karateka* while studying at Yale University. It was 1984 and the young up-and-coming New York programmer had experimented with rotoscoping, an animation technique that involves animators tracing over live-action film movement frame-by-frame.

The end result was a revolutionary platform beat-'em-up that had a story with fast-paced cut-scenes, smooth scrolling backgrounds and, thanks to Mechner's rotoscoping work, animation more fluid than much of what was out there at the time.

"I enjoyed producing *Karateka*," says Mechner. "I wanted to make this kind of karate fighting game at the time, but once I had finished it and saw it had done well, I wanted to push myself." It was then that he decided to pursue something a little different. "My idea with *Prince Of Persia* was to take the game's fluid action and presentation and combine it with a puzzle-solving game that was more along the lines of *Road Runner* and *The Castles Of Dr Creep*, both of which I was enjoying a lot at the time," he says. "So that was really the primary inspiration for *Prince Of Persia* – that and the fact that I loved movies."

Mechner had been given his Apple II computer at the age of 15 and he spent much of his earlier days with the machine playing around with animation. He developed a fascination with recreating human movement – he used his brother, David, as a model and had him jumping, squatting and running, taking footage that he later used to capture the nuances of human agility – and he was also a major fan of action. It was to the now-classic high-tempo blockbuster movies of the Eighties that he flocked as a teenager – the likes of *Indiana Jones* and numerous Spielberg specials.

"I loved the first ten minutes of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*," he states, with an enthusiastic tone he retains despite the passing of time. "That kind of running, jumping action where you feel like the hero is in great danger and escapes by the skin of his teeth was what I wanted to recreate. I wanted to bring that



# Games





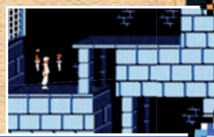
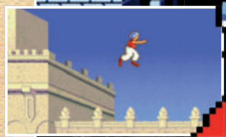
» [360] The 1989 original *Prince Of Persia* was remade by Gameloft and published by Ubisoft for Xbox Live Arcade. It featured the same level design, swordplay, puzzle-solving and storyline, but it had new character designs, animations, visuals and lighting effects. New traps, puzzles and enemies were also added.

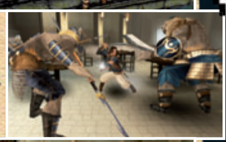


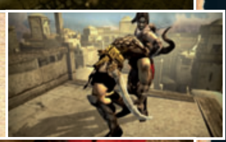
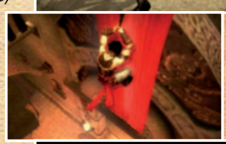
» [Xbox] Combat was heavier than ever in the revival, with the Prince called on to dispatch numerous foes at once.

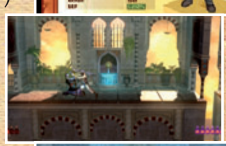
# Gameography of Prince Of Persia

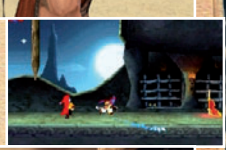
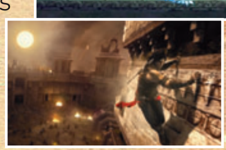
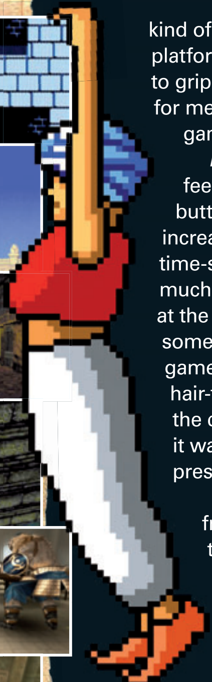
**1989** Prince Of Persia (Apple II, DOS, NES, SNES, Game Boy, Game Boy Color, Mac OS, Amstrad CPC, Amiga, Atari ST, PC Engine, Mega-CD, Mega Drive, SAM Coupé)
**1994** Prince Of Persia 2: The Shadow And The Flame (DOS, SNES, Mac OS)
**1999** Prince Of Persia 3D (Windows, Dreamcast)
**2000** Prince Of Persia: Harem Adventures (Mobile)
**2003** Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time (PS2, Xbox, Windows, GameCube, Mobile)
**2004** Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (PS2, Xbox, Windows, GameCube, Mobile)
**2005** Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones (PS2, Xbox, Windows, GameCube, Mac OS X)
**2005** Prince Of Persia: Revelations (PSP)
**2005** Battles Of Prince Of Persia (DS)
**2007** Prince Of Persia Classic (PSN, XBLA, Wii)
**2007** Prince Of Persia: Rival Swords (PSP, Wii)
**2008** Prince Of Persia (PS3, Xbox 360, Windows, Mac OS X, Mobile)
**2008** Prince Of Persia: The Fallen King (DS)
**2010** Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands (PS3, PSP, Xbox 360, Windows, Wii, DS)



kind of excitement to gaming, to the Apple II platform. It was a machine I was really getting to grips with and it was the most natural thing for me – as an amateur animator, film fan and gamer – to try to do."

*Prince Of Persia* did, indeed, foster a feeling that a wrong step or a mistimed button press in a jostle of swords against increasingly mean guards would lead to a time-sapping death, a fate that would not so much put you out of the game but eat away at the 60 minutes you had to complete it. In some ways, it was as much about the save-game feature as it was the endurance and hair-tearing that accompanied each play, but the concept of time was firmly cemented, and it was one that would endure right up to the present film and loose game tie-in.

"I think what surprised so many – aside from the game itself – was the fact that the Apple II at the time was a really old platform," Mechner confides. "By the time I'd finished *Prince Of Persia* in 1989, the computer was actually more than ten years old. I felt at the time – and I certainly still feel this now – that the first *Prince Of Persia* definitely moved up and even surpassed the hopes that I'd had for the game in the beginning, when I first conceived of it in 1985. But at the same time I was really starting to see other games and other platforms that could go beyond it, technically, in terms of what it was capable of, so in that sense I felt like I was kind of trying to keep up with the market that was evolving even as I was programming the game."

The debut *Prince Of Persia* was a complete success. It was ported to dozens of machines, appearing on consoles as diverse as Nintendo's NES and Game Boy and Sega's Master System and Mega Drive. The game, which sold 2 million copies, had an uncanny knack for making 8-bit machines appear on a par with more advanced computers. The only astonishment was that it took five years for a sequel to appear.

Where *Karateka* and the debut *POP* represented a massive leap in gameplay for the young Mechner, *Prince Of Persia 2: The Shadow And The Flame* was essentially more of the same, albeit

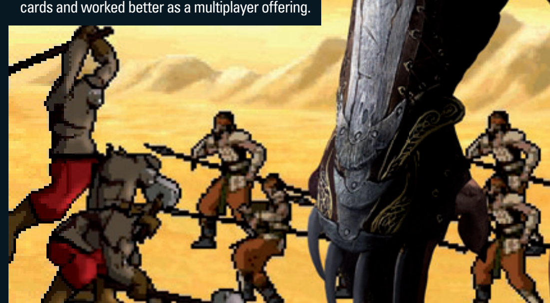





with a greater incidence of sword-tangling, to the point where it was not uncommon to do battle with four foes. Taking place 11 days after the end of the original, it was an altogether more difficult romp, with shinier graphics and a larger area to explore. The game was also keen on plot: the Prince's dream of marrying the Princess is seemingly thrown into disarray when evil Jaffar has him banished from the palace, his escape ship is blasted by a bolt from the sky, and he ends up on a land far away from Persia, determined to get back and sort his single-dom out once more. Life, as you could imagine, was pretty rubbish for him.

And yet if the game showed anything, it was Mechner's penchant for story. So why the increase in combat? "Interesting…" the programmer ponders. "Well, I wouldn't say I regret putting more combat in the game, because when I look back to the debut, I had remade the levels so many times over a period of three years and for the second game I wanted a much more conventional, sort of planned development. Part of that was a desire to make it more combat-heavy, in some sense."

The plan for the second game was rubber-stamped in September 1991. Mechner expressed



» [DS] There have been many versions of *Prince Of Persia*, among them *Battles Of Prince Of Persia* on the Nintendo DS, which took place between *Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within*. It was a turn-based tactics game that had a mixed reception from fans. The game revolved around playing cards and worked better as a multiplayer offering.



his relief that the series would continue, as he had feared that the publisher, Brøderbund, did not want a follow-up. Two of the company's decision-makers, John Baker and Michelle Bushneff, were said to have felt that the project was growing out of control, but following a set of meetings it soon transpired that they really wanted the *Prince Of Persia* genius to be more specific about his direction for the game and the exact requirements of the team that he was about to head.

It was not possible for Mechner to work alone this time; the gaming industry had matured and the bar of expectation was higher. So whereas Mechner created the original title largely without help, the sequel was being afforded a team. Storyboards were needed, graphics had to be specified, and Mechner was the head honcho. He was in his element. "Everyone is deferring to me the way a film crew defers to the director," he wrote in his diary at the time. "Somehow, I've acquired that magic quality: credibility."

Despite his huge success, he admits that he was feeling the pressure. He didn't want the project to fail, as much for his own sake as for the game itself. "If they ever start to doubt me, it could become a nightmare," he wrote. There was a sense that he was riding the crest of a wave, acting out his Hollywood dream in pixellated form and yet deeply foreboding that his crown could be sent flying and he be deposed. From king to prince to pauper…

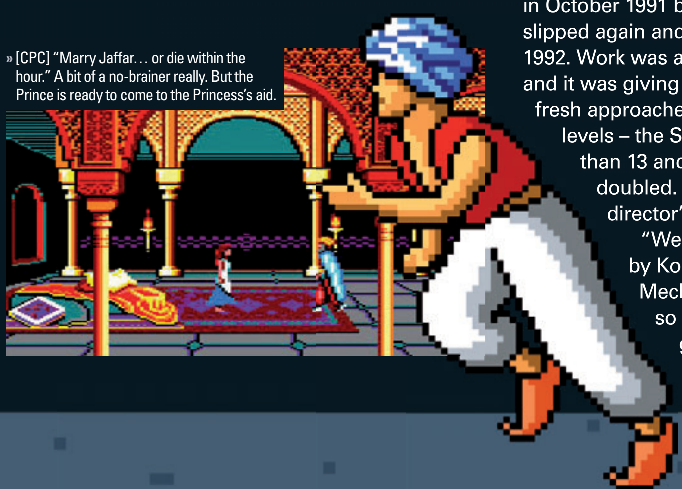
"Yeah, I had a team – a group of artists and programmers," he tells us. "I sort of directed the game remotely. I was living in Paris at the time, making a short film, and I wasn't there 12 hours a day for the development. I think it was a luxury that I had on the first game that maybe enabled that, and with that debut title I really got to tweak the balance over a long period of time. With the second game, though, I pretty much made a couple of drafts of each level and that was it. I had to stick to the schedule."

At the same time as developing the second game, Mechner had to oversee the long-overdue Apple Mac version of the original. It was due in October 1991 but pressure meant that it had slipped again and was looking at a release in early 1992. Work was also progressing on other ports, and it was giving Mechner a chance to oversee fresh approaches, such as better graphics or more levels – the SNES version had 20 levels rather than 13 and the time limit was subsequently doubled. Was it a case of producing a director's cut?

"Well, when I saw the SNES version by Konami I was blown away," says Mechner. "I wasn't the programmer so for me it was like playing the game as a newcomer and I was experiencing my game in the way a gamer did a few years before. I didn't know what was coming and what was going to happen next and it was a lovely feeling. But it also helped spur me on even more to make the sequel special – technical limitations of the first game were severe because the whole game had to fit into 64k of memory. On the Apple II, even just in a few years, in between starting to program the first *Prince Of Persia* in 1986 and the time it released in 1989, the machines were capable of so much more in terms of graphics and sound. I think seeing the release of enhancements – and certainly my eagerness for a full-on sequel – was partly down to the attraction of just being able to have a little bit more freedom, you know, in terms of different types of backgrounds and playing music simultaneously with the game, whereas on the Apple we had to actually freeze the animation to play a couple of notes of music. We had both at the same time."

The infrequent face-to-face communication between Mechner and his team meant, for the first three months, that his art team had been working without even setting eyes on him. He was directing from afar – perhaps not what he would have wanted, but film was still turning his head. Although Mechner had been buoyant the previous September, by January doubts remained and the publisher was threatening to slash the budget. It was into this atmosphere of uncertainly that Mechner walked, and yet there was a sense that *Prince Of Persia 2* was still the project that most artists wanted to work on. The lure of producing realistic animation was a head-turner, and Mechner indulged his art team with a screening of the 1940 film *Thief Of Baghdad* to get them in the mood.





» [CPC] "Marry Jaffar… or die within the hour." A bit of a no-brainer really. But the Prince is ready to come to the Princess's aid.

## The Prince Of Celluloid

### Jordan Mechner reveals his thoughts on the film he pitched, wrote and helped develop

"It was around 2004 and I had the idea to pitch *Prince Of Persia* as a film. With *Sands Of Time*, I felt that it was a second chance to really push the franchise. If there was one thing I hadn't done in the Nineties, it was make the most of the game, so I got together a trailer, using footage from the *Sands Of Time* game, and I showed it to Jerry Bruckheimer.

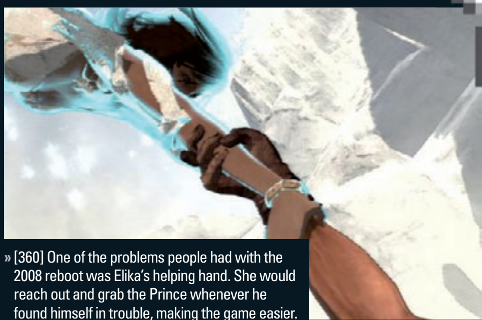
"I also pitched the story of the movie, which I wanted to be different from the game. I kept elements from *Sands Of Time* but I reconfigured it as a story that was intended to be watched rather than played. I think the trailer helped a lot to show what kind of movie it was going to be.

"For me, I think with games and movies there's such a different approach. So what I did was go back to what had been the source of inspiration for *Prince Of Persia*, and that was a particular kind of swashbuckling action of which *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was an example. I was also inspired by *Robin Hood*, and I tried to make a movie in that genre.

"I think the *Sands Of Time* story really lends itself well to a film, and I think it's really good for that kind of big, spectacular summer movie. What I will say is that the powers of the dagger are really specifically structured to serve the game. For example, the fact that everyone in the world has turned into monsters, except for the hero and the villain, and they then build a dagger by fighting these monsters. That's an element of mythology that supports the gameplay. In the movie, that doesn't really make sense, so I limited the powers of the dagger. You'll have to see it – it's really cool."



» *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* is on general release from the 21 May at cinemas everywhere.



» [360] One of the problems people had with the 2008 reboot was Elika's helping hand. She would reach out and grab the Prince whenever he found himself in trouble, making the game easier.





That, however, wasn't the main issue. He had to persuade Baker that it was a game worth the immense investment. And in his approach, Mechner proved to be a master director, using the trick of ensuring that the boss felt a sense of involvement in the project. Before long, he had thrown the company's resources behind the game, even though he was still nervous of the cost. Indeed, it was the most expensive game in Brøderbund's history. And yet the desire for film was still with him. "I know what I want to do with my life," he writes. "Why not just do it?"

The hands-off approach to *Prince Of Persia 2* did get to him. He loved being able to step in and help with a crisis such as making heavy graphics cuts. And neither did he regret having to scale back the game's ambition. "Sometimes I feel a game that is very polished and has had a lot of cash spent on it can appear a little too sanitised," he says. And it was around this time that he began to see the real attraction of producing a game, which he says was "more fun than 16mm student filmmaking".

As the game neared completion, Mechner was nevertheless becoming jaded, caring little for details that would, at any other time, be an excitement. One of those was the name. He cared little whether the tag would be *The Shadow And The Flame*, *City Of The Dead* or *City Of Souls*. But was he pleased with the game, looking back?

"I was in a lot of ways, but it wasn't quite the close… you know, the intimate involvement that I had on the first game, just because I was geographically apart and personally there was a little bit more distance," he says. "I wasn't living and breathing it every day in the way I was with the first game."

Mechner wrestled intensely with his inner self during this period. It was clear to him that, while enjoying the creation of games, his life's dreams were not being fulfilled. He had yearned for a girlfriend, felt the urge to see the world, and that desire for a movie would never leave him. It is why, for his next project, he produced *The Last Express*.

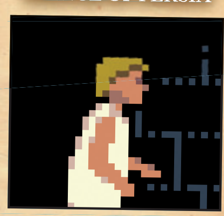
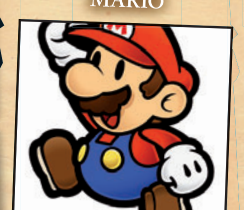
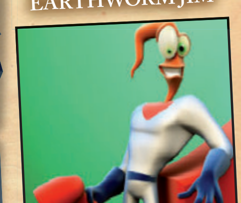
In 1993 Mechner set up Smoking Car Productions primarily to design his new game, which was set on the Orient Express in 1914. Players were pitted in the role of US doctor Robert Cath, framed for the murder of an Irish police officer, and the Agatha Christie-style yarn was notable for being entirely played in real-time.

And time is what Mechner was feeling like he had precious little of and so, when he finished the production of the game, his interest in film was piqued once more. It didn't help that *The Last Express* was a failure commercially – despite being a success critically – due to the Brøderbund marketing department quitting weeks before its release in 1997. So when Red Orb Entertainment started to produce the third game in the *Prince Of Persia* series at that time, Mechner was underwhelmed. With the gaming public by now used to seeing games in the third dimension, a decision was made to make the third *POP* a 3D masterpiece. The idea was for The Learning Company to publish the game and that it would be created for the PC. It made its debut in 1999.

The difficulties – some financial – that so marred the release of *The Last Express*, however, caught *Prince Of Persia 3D* as well and, as a consequence, it was released without having been through any

## Athlete Kings

The Prince isn't the only gaming character known for his athleticism

| | PRINCE OF PERSIA | STRIDER | MARIO | SONIC THE HEDGEHOG | TWINSEN | EARTHWORM JIM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Agility | 17/20 | 19/20 | 17/20 | 14/20 | 15/20 | 17/20 |
| Strength | 17/20 | 18/20 | 17/20 | 17/20 | 16/20 | 18/20 |
| Stamina | 18/20 | 17/20 | 17/20 | 15/20 | 18/20 | 18/20 |
| Fighting | 17/20 | 18/20 | 16/20 | 14/20 | 14/20 | 16/20 |
| Good looks | 18/20 | 18/20 | 10/20 | 17/20 | 5/20 | 1/20 |
| **Overall** | **87/100** | **90/100** | **77/100** | **77/100** | **68/100** | **70/100** |

# Games inspired by a prince

## Flashback

- **Developer:** Delphine Software
- **Publisher:** US Gold
- **Platforms:** Amiga, Acorn Archimedes, Mega Drive, DOS, SNES, 3DO, Atari Jaguar, CD-i,
- **Year:** 1992

Both *Flashback* and *Prince Of Persia* made use of the rotoscoping technique, but they were developed independently of each other. The style of the two games is very similar, and with *Flashback* coming after *Prince Of Persia*, it will undoubtedly have drawn inspiration from Mechner's game.



## Blackthorne

- **Developer:** Blizzard Entertainment
- **Publisher:** Interplay
- **Platforms:** SNES, DOS, Sega 32X, Mac, GBA
- **Year:** 1994

*Blackthorne* was less reliant on platforming and concentrated more on puzzles and combat, but the inspiration was clear. The character had the Prince's abilities and weaknesses, and the play involved elements of trial and error. One problem is that fighting could be repetitive, which wasn't the case in *Prince Of Persia*.



## Tomb Raider

- **Developer:** Core Design
- **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive
- **Platforms:** Sega Saturn, PlayStation, PC, Macintosh, Windows Mobile, N-Gage, PSN
- **Year:** 1995

With its mix of running, jumping and platforming, the inspiration for *Tomb Raider* is clear. Lara Croft is essentially a female Indiana Jones, the character who inspired Mechner to create *Prince Of Persia*. The tricky puzzles of *POP* were, in essence, transported over to a lush 3D world.



## Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee

- **Developer:** Oddworld Inhabitants
- **Publisher:** GT Interactive
- **Platforms:** PlayStation, PC, Windows, Game Boy, PSN
- **Year:** 1997

Athough creator of the still-unfinished *Oddworld* saga Lorne Lanning says the game was more inspired by *Another World*, the 2D PlayStation platform game *Oddworld* was very similar to *Prince Of Persia* in layout and playability. You even hoisted up platforms, *Prince Of Persia*-style – until a marauding Slig shot you down.



## Heart Of Darkness

- **Developer:** Amazing Studio
- **Publisher:** Interplay
- **Platforms:** PlayStation, PC
- **Year:** 1998

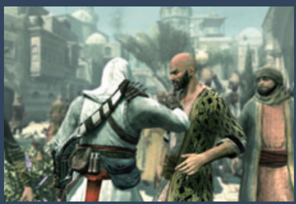
What *Prince Of Persia* did was create a sub-genre of 2D platform games, which was continued by the likes of *Heart Of Darkness*. This 2D side-scroller had similar gameplay, with the main character walking, jumping, climbing and crawling through levels, attacking any enemies that he came across. This game helped keep the sub-genre alive.



## Assassin's Creed

- **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal
- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Platforms:** PS3, Xbox 360, PC
- **Year:** 2007

The mobile game by Gameloft was incredibly similar to the debut *Prince Of Persia* game, albeit with more features. Indeed, Gameloft has been inspired by *Prince Of Persia* with other titles too. But *Assassin's Creed* on consoles was inspired by the second *POP* trilogy, beginning with *The Sands Of Time*, all of which may not have existed without Mechner's original.

















substantial quality assurance. The bugs were there to see and the reviews were scathing, although some did see the good points.

The third game followed the same side-scrolling premise of the previous titles and it had a similar story. There were guards, traps and ledges, and the only real difference between the 3D version and the previous two was that third dimension. To Red Orb's credit, it managed to effectively translate the gameplay of Mechner's first two efforts to a 3D world, and the level design was actually solid. Commentators praised the pace of the game and felt the graphics – aside from the characters – did the levels justice. That was ironic given that the hallmark of the first two games was the fluid nature of the Prince. GameSpot's Ron Dulin quipped: "The motion-captured animation looks great, except when the Prince runs up stairs or ramps, at which point he looks like an old man who just doesn't have it in him any more. Then again, it's been ten years since he first took to adventuring, so perhaps we should give him a break."

Reviewers pulled the controls apart. They were unresponsive – unforgivably so at times. And the camera perspective was poor, fixed behind the Prince and obstructing the view of obstacles. It also made combat difficult. There was more criticism too: many didn't like the voice-acting, believing it to be lacking authenticity. In finally giving the Prince a voice, it seems most wanted to go back in time to the period when he was mute. Above all, Mechner was not involved in the project except in a consultancy role. He had been to film school and had shot the short documentary *Waiting For Dark*, which looked at the terrible living conditions in Havana in Cuba, and that is where his ambitions appeared to be heading.

"The third game was a development that Brøderbund decided to do internally," says Mechner. "At that point, I was already more into films. I'd just done *The Last Express*, which was a different kind of game, and basically *Prince Of Persia 3D* wasn't a project that I spearheaded. Film was where I was at."

Mechner did, however, play the game, although he admits to not getting past the second level. But commercially it was a success, actually going gold. Not that Mechner was all that enamoured by it. He instead spent time in the late Nineties and turn of the century producing another documentary, *Chavez Ravine*, which looked at how a Mexican-American village was bulldozed to make way for the Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.



# A to Z of Prince of Persia

**A** is for Alter Egos. Throughout the series, the Prince bumps into alternate forms of himself, from the Shadow in the original and sequel to the Sand Wraith in *Warrior Within* and the Dark Prince in *The Two Thrones*.

**B** is for Brøderbund. The first two games of the series were published by Brøderbund, before the company's acquisition by The Learning Company. Its collapse and subsequent rush to get the game out was behind the lack of polish on *Prince Of Persia 3D*.

**C** is for Combat. There is much swordplay to be had throughout the games of the *Prince Of Persia* series. Jordan Mechner watched Errol Flynn movies in order to perfect the technique on screen.

**D** is for Dagger. The Dagger of Time allows the Prince to manipulate time itself by harnessing the power of the Sands of Time.

**E** is for Exploration. One of the main aspects of the *Prince Of Persia* games is to explore the world around you. This increased in importance as the series and its underlying technology progressed.

**F** is for Film. Directed by Mike Newell, produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and written by *Prince Of Persia* creator Jordan Mechner, the movie is a summer 2010 blockbuster.

**G** is for Graphic Novel. Not content with the games and films, Jordan Mechner has also produced a series of *Prince Of Persia* graphic novels.

**H** is for Hourglass. From the first game in which you had 60 minutes to rescue the Princess, this basic symbol of time has been ever-present in the series.

**I** is for Indiana Jones. Right from the start, the Prince was influenced by the iconic Dr Jones – the first ten minutes of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* in particular – with the emphasis being on action and exploration.

**J** is for Jordan. The entire *Prince Of Persia* premise was thought up by wannabe filmmaker and games programmer Jordan Mechner in the late Eighties, when he was 21.

**K** is for *Karateka*. It may not have been part of the *POP* world, but this martial arts game was the title that paved the way for the entire *Prince Of Persia* franchise.

**L** is for Love. The Prince's infatuation with the Princess, who was all too easily locked up, was the driving force behind our hero's actions.

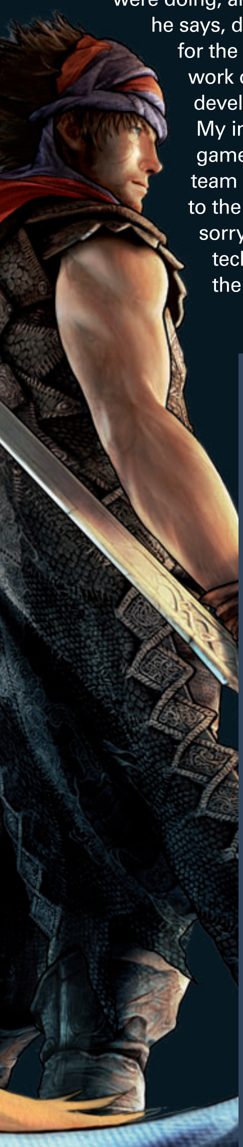
**M** is for Magic Potions. There are many ways to die in the older *Prince Of Persia* games, so being able to quaff a heath-rejuvenating magical smoothie was like a gift from the gods.

**N** is for No Name. In the games, the Prince is known simply as 'Prince', but that has changed in the movie, with our hero given the moniker Dastan.



» [Xbox] *The Two Thrones* took a step backwards from the aesthetic change of *Warrior Within*.





*Prince Of Persia 3D* remains, to some extent, an embarrassment for him.

"I knew the team and I sort of saw what they were doing, and their initial plan sounded exciting," he says, diplomatically. "They had high hopes for the game and so I hoped that it would work out, too. But it was a very difficult development – they had a lot of setbacks. My impression was that I don't think the game really fulfilled the criteria that the team had for it. For myself, I only got up to the second level when I played it. I'm sorry to say that was partly because of a technical problem. The PC that I had at the time just wasn't powerful enough to keep up and the game had certain technical problems, which stopped me from playing it. I meant to get back and play the rest of it but I never did."

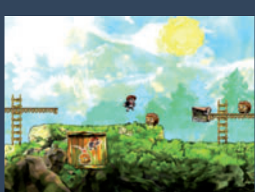
Mechner's lack of proper involvement in the third game has meant that he has tried to erase it from the storyline. For him, the game has become an irritation of sorts and one that he is keen to erase. "I don't really see that as part of the *Prince Of Persia* collection," he says. "It was a bit of a one-off. Overall, for me, the inspiration of the Prince was always kind of Errol Flynn, Douglas Fairbanks, or Indiana Jones in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. He was just a type of action hero who got his personality from the turmoil that he went through. It wasn't a dialogue or facial expressions. It was very much that he expressed his personality through movement and when I look back, the third game didn't really work."

Up until this point, Mechner, in his desire to break away from gaming and try new things, failed to see what he actually had. He confesses that he needed to recharge his batteries by trying new things, but it meant he lost sight of the franchise he had built. In 2001, however, he received a call from Ubisoft, whose president wanted to discuss the possibility of recreating the game for a new generation. Mechner wasn't sure. He had felt uneasy about *Prince Of Persia 3D* and, if he agreed at all, he wanted to create something amazing. Without that guarantee, he was wary of agreeing to anything, but he did fly to Paris and discuss the possibilities.

"I received a personal call from Yves Guillemot [Ubisoft's president]," he recalls. "Ubisoft had just acquired the rights for the name from Brøderbund and I think one of the motivations was this opportunity to bring it back. But I still had the intellectual property rights. It's fair to say at that time the game was a classic, but nothing was being done with it. I'd seen *Rayman*, which I thought was an absolutely brilliant game, and I thought the *Prince Of Persia* game could be done for a new generation of consoles, you know?"

Mechner gave the project the green light but on the provision that a great team would be assembled. A squad was put together in Montreal and the producer joined Mechner at E3 in LA to discuss the project further. "It was strange for me to go back to the project," says Mechner. "A lot had happened from the time I had put the second game together. I went from *The Last Express*, a three-year project that involved forming a team, starting a company, and something that was really a labour of love for all concerned. And I think also at that time the games market had changed so that the side-scrollers had given way to games like *Tomb Raider*.

## Stories through time



### Braid

- **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
- **Developer:** Jonathan Blow
- **Platforms:** Xbox 360, Windows, PS3, Mac OS X
- **Year:** 2008

Jonathan Blow's 2008 XBLA game is, like *Prince Of Persia*, about a man searching for a kidnapped princess. But while the story is centred on personal discovery and insight, it gives players the ability to manipulate time. You can rewind to points before death or use time to solve puzzles. It's a great, retro-looking 2D platformer.

### Shadow Of Memories

- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Platforms:** PS2, Windows, Xbox, PSP
- **Year:** 2001

This 2001 cult classic PS2 title put you in the shoes of Eike Kusch, a man who died at the start of the game. After his spirit gains the ability to travel through time, he goes back and forth to 2001, 1980, 1902 and 1580, looking for a way to prevent his own death in the present day.






### The Chaos Engine

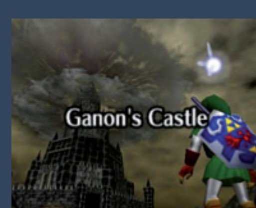
- **Publisher:** Renegade Software
- **Developer:** Bitmap Brothers
- **Platforms:** Amiga, Atari ST, Amiga CD32, DOS, Risc OS, Mega Drive, SNES
- **Year:** 1993

Released in 1993 and created by The Bitmap Brothers, *The Chaos Engine* saw the technology of a stranded time-traveller fall into the hands of an inventor, who then produces an alternate timeline and a machine that can fiddle with matter, space and time, resurrecting all sorts of ghastly beasts.

### The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Platform:** Nintendo 64
- **Year:** 1998

Using the Master Sword in this 1998 Nintendo game, you can travel between two time periods, but there are also many opportunities to teleport to previously visited locations in a game that, by the nature of its title, suggests that you can use time and space as your ultimate playground in this amazing, classic adventure.







### Time Zone

- **Publisher:** On-Line Systems
- **Developer:** Roberta Williams
- **Platforms:** Apple II
- **Year:** 1982

Written by Roberta Williams for the Apple II, *Time Zone* let you travel through time and solve puzzles. Input was via text but you were still thrilled to 'meet' some of history's most celebrated figures from Julius Caesar to Cleopatra. If Roberta could go back in time, maybe she wouldn't have sold the game for a whopping $99.

**O** is for Okay. Mechner confesses that he was just an "okay" programmer and says that he was glad when the industry moved on to allow him to concentrate on plot and character development.

**P** is for Portable – and Prince, of course. But as well as being a hot computer and console title, games have also appeared on the likes of the Game Boy, Nintendo DS and PSP.

**Q** is for Quality. Jordan Mechner didn't have the appetite for the 2003 reboot and insisted that it could only go ahead if the quality bar was at its highest. The game and its success reignited his passion.

**R** is for Rotoscoping. The first *Prince Of Persia* game amazed players with the fluidity of the main character, producing using the animation technique of rotoscoping, based on tracing footage of live-action movement.

**S** is for Sand. As in *Sands Of Time*. All good franchises get a reboot and so Ubisoft's *Sands Of Time* emerged in 2003 to revitalise the series.

**T** is for Traps. No *Prince Of Persia* game is complete without traps. Whether it be spikes, perilous gaps, circular saws, giant jaws or a horizontal blade, our Prince would wince at the mere thought.

**U** is for Unlock. If you have a copy of *The Sands Of Time* to hand, you can unlock the original *Prince Of Persia* game and play. On the Xbox version, you can also blast through *Prince Of Persia 2*.

**V** is for Vizier. The Prince is never too far away from being antagonised by an evil and persistent Vizier, usually trying to sweep the love of his life away from him and use his powers to turn the world against our hero.

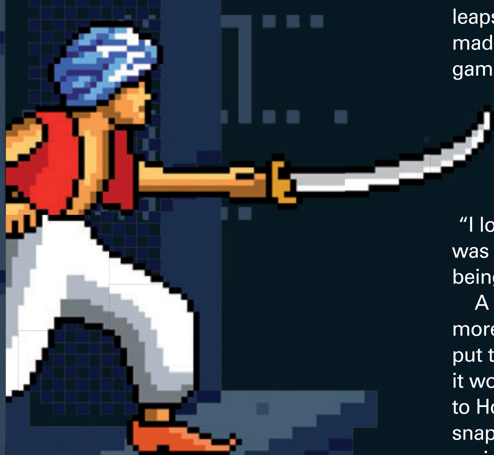
**W** is for World Records. *Guinness World Records* says that *Prince Of Persia* was the first game to include motion-captured animation, and it was the highest rated platformer on the PS2 and Xbox.

**X** is for XBLA. Ubisoft remade the original *Prince Of Persia* game in 2007 with better graphics and a few gameplay tweaks. Play it on Xbox Live Arcade or PlayStation Network.

**Y** is for Yes. When Chris White almost single-handedly converted *Prince Of Persia* to the SAM Coupé in 1992, not telling anybody that he was doing it until it was almost done, it was granted a release by an impressed Domark.

**Z** is for Zillions. Well, okay, millions. The original *Prince Of Persia* sold 2 million copies worldwide.





But the more I heard, the more I felt it was right to bring it back and do it differently."

*Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* was released in 2003 for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and PC. The main character displayed incredible fluidity and it was set in a sun-bathed mystical 3D Middle East. The action revolved around the Dagger of Time, which the Prince steals in order to gift to his father, but an evil vizier gets him to unlock it, an hourglass is unleashed, and chaos reigns.

There was no doubting that the Prince was back, and he was looking better than ever. Death-defying leaps and a control system that was forgiving made for a slick, high-energy action game that had gamers in awe. The linear gameplay led the Prince down a particular path yet it distracted little, mainly because the gamer was more interested in the gravity-defying stunts.

The game also celebrated its roots, with the original *Prince Of Persia* included on the disc. "I loved *Sands Of Time*," says Mechner. "I felt it was very true to the original, while at the same time being a game that could stand on its own merits."

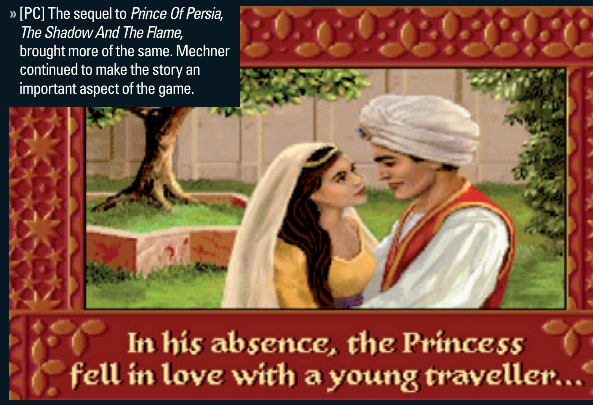
A year later and Mechner's thoughts turned once more to film. He started to write a screenplay and put together clips from the game to illustrate how it would come together. This was later pitched to Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer, who snapped up the movie rights and pushed the project forward. For Mechner it was the final realisation of a dream – the movie he so wanted all his life. And it was made possible through his perseverance with gaming, a medium that he had grown to love immensely.

"I worked very closely with Ubisoft on *Sands Of Time*. I was moved to Montreal for the last part of the development and I worked as a game designer and writer, so I was very deeply and creatively involved in it. But after the game was released, I moved to LA to start pitching the game as a movie project. It meant I wasn't really that involved with the second game in the series, *Warrior Within*."



» [360] *The Forgotten Sands* returns to the *Sands Of Time* trilogy and has so far been received positively.

» [PC] The sequel to *Prince Of Persia, The Shadow And The Flame*, brought more of the same. Mechner continued to make the story an important aspect of the game.




*Warrior Within* was released in 2004, and it was followed by the third game in the second trilogy, *The Two Thrones*, which debuted in 2005. Mechner was, by now, fully immersed in his film project. "I think as the second trilogy progressed, the games became a lot darker, certainly with *Warrior Within*," he says. "I felt like *The Two Thrones* was sort of a step back and halfway between *Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within* in terms of tone."

Both sequels were massively popular, building on the success of *Sands Of Time*. Some felt that *Warrior Within* lost some of the charm of the first game, but the title had longer playing time and the combat was less repetitive. The story picked up from the end of *Sands Of Time*, and the time-travelling element was at the forefront – the backtracking and flips forward adding hours.

*The Two Thrones* wrapped things up neatly and the latest game, *The Forgotten Sands*, returns to the original trilogy and sits in between *Sands Of Time* and *Warrior Within*, where there was a seven-year gap in the plot. Time has been the hallmark not just of the series, but Mechner's life too.

And yet that is not everything. In 2008, Ubisoft released a reboot, which has now seemingly been abandoned. Called, simply, *Prince Of Persia*, it was deemed too simplistic by some gamers and yet was also a great success. "I thought it was quite beautiful in some ways," says Mechner. He then pauses and reflects. "I will say that *Prince Of Persia* is the project that I've been most deeply involved with, as a writer and creator. When I look at the series as a whole, there's a sense of awe. If I could have had a Dagger of Time back in 1985 when I started making the first game, if I'd seen that all this stuff was coming, I would have been amazed because it's more than I could have dreamed of."

# RETRO SHAMER

» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

# PREDATOR

**In terms of duff movie-to-videogame translations, Activision's *Predator* ranked as one of the most infuriating offerings to find release. Based on John McTiernan's 1987 blockbuster movie, in which a group of hardened commandos led by Dutch (Arnold Schwarzenegger) find themselves hunted by an alien warrior through the jungles of Guatemala. The videogame tie-in was your typical run-and-gun game that featured promising ideas marred by messy gameplay, a weird love for reloading, and some over reliance on the colours brown and green.**

Here is the *Predator* experience summed up in a few paragraphs. You spot the cool looking game box, remember how cool the film was, and immediately part with whatever the shop seller is asking in order for you to take the game home and experience its obvious potential. You plonk it into your Amstrad, and wait patiently for the game to load, as it slowly draws you something that looks like a melting Arnold Schwarzenegger. The game starts, you're treated to a pointless introduction showing the Predator ship landing on Earth, and then finally the action begins.

On the first stage you and your identical-looking brown soldier friends jump out of a helicopter and head straight for an enemy base. As you would expect, legions of soldier enemies dressed in brown fatigues run at you - so many, in fact, that their corporeal shapes begin to conjoin and overlap, forming what starts to look like giant pieces of moving dog shit for the player to shoot at. If any of the dog shit touches you, it drains your energy instantly. You fire your machine gun at the stodgy brown clumps, and some parts break off and fall on the ground, returning to their human-like form, but as the gun fires a million bullets a second it doesn't take long before your ammo dries up and you're simply left to peg through the brown-looking jungle while ensuring your little brown sprite avoids anything that is both brown and moving. It's around this point that the screen turns all psychedelic, with the brown hues replaced by garish neon colours (the Predator's thermal imaging POV, not your character going blind from all that dog shit). It's at this point you must avoid something that looks like a breakdown recovery triangle as it slowly moves around the screen. Obviously, if the triangle touches your sprite you die instantly and if this happens a few times the game is over. 'No biggie', you think; it's your first attempt. However, with *Predator*, upon dying you are presented with the hair-pulling words 'rewind tape and press play'. So you eject the *Predator* cassette, aggressively drop kick it into your games collection and vow never to pick it up again.

But, later that night, you lie in bed thinking it was something you did, that surely a big film license cannot be so dire. So the next morning you boot up the game and carefully approach the gameplay as it were about to explode at any moment. You return to the suck, and the room turns a hazy shade of green and brown. Fin.

### A WORD FROM THE HERO

"DILLAN! YOU SONOFABITCH, it's Dutch here. I hate whining computa geeks. I just heard some SONOFABITCHES from **Retro Gamer** trashing my game because it was too hard. STOP WHINING! They said the graphics were poor, and every time you died you had to wait for the game to reload. I WILL CRUSH THOSE SONOFABITCHES!"





» [CPC] You'd be forgiven for thinking the game was set in a sewer – it's actually a jungle in Guatemala.

### GAME INFO

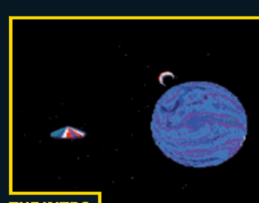



- » **SYSTEM:** CPC
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **GENRE:** RUN N' GUN



» [CPC] This game loves loading almost as much as we hate playing it.

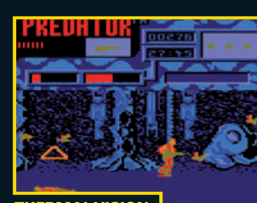
## » THE POINTLESS PARTS



**THE INTRO**
The intro is supposed to be the Predator ship crash landing on Earth, but looks more someone throwing a Frisbee very far.



**THE GUN**
Considering your guns will dry out of ammo within seconds of starting the game makes them pointless in our eyes.



**THERMAL VISION**
Though these Predator POV bits fail to add any drama to the gameplay, they do save your eyes from the brown graphics.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

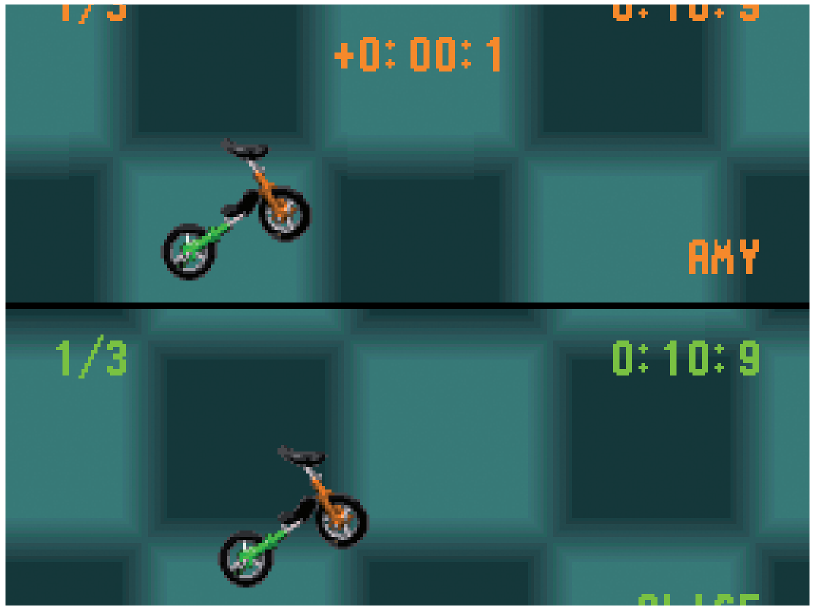
# CHEAP AS CHIPS




If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…



» [SNES] *Unirally* takes some getting used to, but once you've learnt the tracks the races get utterly addictive.




» [SNES] Using state-of-the-art technology, we can show you how *Unirally* would've looked had it starred bicycles rather than unicycles.

## UNIRALLY

**The day some bright spark stumbled on the realisation that you could do away with the safety parts of Penny Farthings and ride the front wheel instead – which is a little bit like doing away with teacups and drinking boiling tea straight from teapots – the most dangerous mode of man-powered transport since the piranha roller-skates was born, and quickly became the preferred mode of transport for clowns, street performers, and annoying show-offs the world over.**

Loathe or love them, though, unicycles did give us one of the most unique multiplayer racers to ever grace the Super Nintendo, and a game that proved Nintendo's 16-bit console could handle a super-charged platformer like *Sonic The Hedgehog* if the moment ever called for it.

If *Sonic*'s compound was one part racer to two parts platformer, then *Unirally*'s was the exact same ingredients but with the measurements flipped. It was a cracking racer with plenty of platformer themes – jumping came into play quite a bit in the game, be it through the game rewarding players for pulling off tricks, to the dizzying selection of tracks that snaked and looped all over the show.

After selecting your unicycle, it was time to select the tour you wanted to tackle. Each one comprised of five different events, broken up into bronze, silver and gold difficulties, split between one-on-one race events to occasional trick-style competitions that involved smashing a specific score in a set time limit. With the action coming at you thick and fast, and the races viewed from a side-on perspective, your view is obstructed from seeing oncoming dangers and sharp turns in the track. As such, *Unirally* did take a fair bit of time to get grips with. Conversely, owing to the simple and familiar nature of the track designs, after a few goes you quickly found yourself remembering the lay of the track and getting the very best out of the game.

Once you had got to grips with the racing, though, you could concentrate on mastering an excellent facet to *Unirally*'s gameplay, as performing stunts and tricks momentarily gives your racer a speed boost. Basically: the better the trick, the better the speed perk, and this added a nice risk-versus-reward mechanic to the gameplay. Misjudge the landing from an ambitious Treble Flip and you 'wipeout' and slow down a little, but land perfectly and reap a gratifying speed boost. With plenty of game to plough through, and an excellent and wonderfully addictive split-screen multiplayer mode that elevates the game to *Micro Machines* and *Mario Kart* levels of classic multiplayer status, *Unirally* is a game that offers bags of value and entertainment.

Sadly, despite its brilliance, due to some corporate meanness – Pixar took DMA Design to court over the similarities of its unicycle racer to a unicycle creation in their animated short Red Dawn – the game's production and any chance of a sequel was tragically curtailed. And yet weirdly, despite its limited production run, the game can actually be snapped up for around a tenner these days, while unboxed and sans-manual versions trade hands for as little as a fiver.




### INFO

- » **SYSTEM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** DMA DESIGN




» [SNES] The game has a distinct burnished look, which was of course very in vogue during the twilight era of the SNES.




# Zork

> The most famous text adventure of them all, Zork was a pioneer and remains an important videogame milestone. Armed only with wits and cunning, Craig Grannell braves possible death-by-grue to track down Zork co-creator Dave Lebling in The Great Underground Empire (well, Massachusetts) to find out about its birth

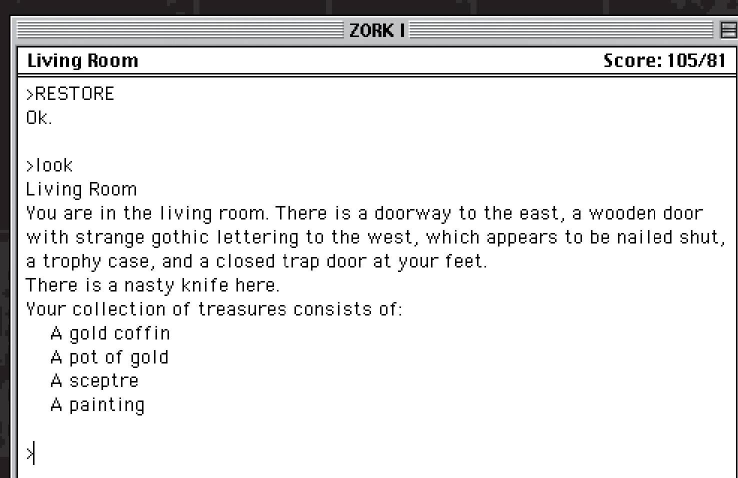
**The mere mention of the word 'Zork' is enough to send gamers of a certain age and inclination to a happy place. It wasn't the first text adventure, but in pushing the boundaries in terms of story, puzzles and parser, *Zork* showed how videogames of its kind could become interactive fiction, rather than mere text-based puzzle games with basic interaction and vocabulary.**

*Zork* began life at MIT, where Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Bruce Daniels and Dave Lebling were members of the MIT Dynamic Modelling Group. Dave recalls he had a free slot in his first semester's schedule and an advisor recommended he take a programming course: "He said it would be useful – and it was – but I also had fun, which was more important." During the course, Dave learned Fortran and IBM assembly language, and saw demos of *Spacewar!* and *Eliza*, steering him towards games. "I'd also played arcade games, and my family had a Magnavox Odyssey, but on playing homebrew games at MIT, I got interested in writing my own."

At the time, the first adventure game, the suitably named *Adventure* (also known as *Colossal Cave Adventure*), was doing the rounds. Designed by Will Crowther and expanded by Don Woods, the game was inspired by Kentucky's Mammoth Cave system and augmented with Tolkienesque fantasy elements. Along with acting as inspiration for Dave and his friends, *Adventure* became a motivational programming challenge: "We all agreed *Adventure* was wonderful – when it hit the MIT Lab for Computer Science, no work was done for two weeks – but we thought it could be improved… but this was the MIT mentality about almost anything!"

With the basic idea in place of an improved *Adventure*, set in a similar environment and "with more jokes and sardonic humour", the four friends began work. Although everyone "dabbled in all sorts of things", Dave recalls Marc concentrated most on the parser, Tim on the game's internals, and Marc and Bruce devised most of the puzzles. Dave dealt with the grues (deadly predators that lurk in dark areas to eat unwary adventurers), the game's battles, and "reams of purple prose". The result was a game that began with you, a nameless adventurer, in a field, west of a white house with a boarded door. After a swift episode of breaking and entering, you discover a trophy case and trapdoor. Venture down the ladder revealed by the trapdoor and your path back is abruptly blocked, but your mission begins: exploring and learning about *Zork*'s sprawling Great Underground Empire, with the goal of returning from it alive and loaded down with treasure.

Because *Zork* was something of a pioneer, its creators had no genre conventions to follow. "We didn't know we were working in 'interactive fiction' until much later," affirms Dave. "We were just writing a game –






» The *Zork* universe ended up in book form via *Choose Your Own Adventure*-style titles, written by none other than Infocom's own Steve Meretzky.

## > A world of words

**WHILE RESEARCHING THIS** article, we discovered that Dave Lebling and fellow Infocom alumnus Steve Meretzky are the only two interactive fiction writers who've ever been admitted into the Science Fiction Writers of America. The SFWA is, according to its website (sfwa.org), a professional organisation for authors of sci-fi, fantasy and related genres. Members have included Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury, and the SFWA "informs, supports, promotes, defends and advocates for its members".

"It was partly a stunt," says Dave on his own admission. "At the time the SFWA qualifications were fairly loose and didn't say much if anything about the medium a writer worked in. It was sort of assumed it was paper or maybe television or movies. There was something about 'several short works or one novel'." Dave and Steve added up the wordage of their sci-fi games, decided they were [equivalent to] novelettes or novellas, and applied. "They let us in. I did the same thing with the Mystery Writers of America at the time, and I got in there, too.

"Later, after lots of other game writers applied and got in, they tightened the rules. I stayed a member of both for years, finally dropping my membership when I hadn't actually written any new games in years."

not an 'adventure game', because we didn't know it was a type yet!" Dave also notes that *Adventure*'s code was by and large ignored, because it was in Fortran and the *Zork* team had a more powerful AI-oriented language based on Lisp. "It was called Muddle, or sometimes MDL," says Dave. "We had some background and interest in parsing and object representation, and we just plunged in. It was, after all, supposed to be for fun. We replicated parts of the *Adventure* 'UI' we thought useful – commands like Inventory, Score, and so on – but we added lots more."

*Zork* grew organically, components added as they were needed, and the underlying 'package' (or 'library' as it would be called today) was continually reworked to accommodate expansions. "I don't think anything was preplanned," thinks Dave. "Sometimes expansions were built around an idea, such as 'other characters', but not always. Each new expansion was designed and implemented somewhat as a 'unit' – the Alice/Robot area, the Bank of Zork, the Block Puzzle, the End Game – but at this point *Zork* was a fun hobby rather than a business proposition. We were lucky to have people who were willing to make it all work and track down all the ugly bugs!"

In terms of characters, *Zork* deviated little from *Adventure*'s fantasy leanings. Despite what people sometimes claim today, Dave says there was no strong *Dungeons & Dragons* influence, except perhaps for the fighting component: "I wrote that because I was a *D&D* player and thought it would be fun to do. The original fight with the troll was 'kill troll with sword' and he was dead! But none of the other authors had played *Dungeons & Dragons* – remember, this was 1977 and *D&D* was pretty new back then."

Unlike the fantasy creatures you meet in *Zork*, your own character is a blank slate. Dave explains that this was a deliberate decision, to enable the player to imprint themselves on to *Zork*'s lead: "The main character was indeed intentionally a blank slate, and not even gender was specified. In early versions, there were times the character was described or said something that made it a 'him', but we rewrote them as soon as we noticed. Later, at Infocom, we continued the 'blank slate' idea until we deliberately subverted it with games where the character's gender played a role – *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* – or was pre-defined to be either a woman, such as in *Plundered Hearts*, or a man, as in *Shogun*."

Although *Zork*'s characters offered little in the way of innovation, the same wasn't true of the writing. In terms of descriptive content and interaction, *Zork* excelled for the time, although Dave again admits that little of what went into the game was planned in any detail. "The room descriptions were written by whomever wrote the room they described," he recalls, explaining that this is why the tone of descriptions was so varied: "You could often guess who wrote what – my room descriptions tended to have purple prose, Marc's were funny, Bruce's were outrageous, and Tim's tended towards the sardonic." In many ways, the slap-dash nature of the writing in *Zork* is a surprising revelation. Even today, *Zork* has a palpable sense of atmosphere – right from the start, you're drawn in by the lone house, the discovery of the trapdoor, and your way back being mysteriously barred. The underground world is full of mystery and surprises, regularly punctuated by humour and excitement.

> "The room descriptions were written by whomever wrote the room they described"

"*Zork*'s atmosphere was a hodge-podge, but not deliberately so," says Dave. "It all arose from multiple authors and multiple stages of implementation – whatever was in the author's mind that day ended up as the game's atmosphere! So the variety within the game and the atmosphere working out was fortuitous, but not planned."

By contrast, one of the few elements of *Zork* that was most definitely planned was its parser, with the team determined to surpass basic verb/noun constructions. "Going beyond the 'two-word parser' in *Adventure* was one of the first actual goals of *Zork*. We had been frustrated at the dearth of things the parser understood, and the number of objects that were referenced in the descriptions that the parser didn't know about. So those features were built in from the beginning," says Dave. "Subsequently, shortcuts like 'N' for 'north' evolved as we decided we needed them, partly from examining the transcripts of guest users on the system.

"We had the ability to make a transcript and also to watch them as >



Dave Lebling




### IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** PERSONAL SOFTWARE/INFOCOM

» **DEVELOPER:** TIM ANDERSON, MARC BLANK, BRUCE DANIELS, DAVE LEBLING

» **PLATFORM:** DEC PDP-10 (AS 'DUNGEON' AND 'ZORK'). CONVERTED/EXPANDED AS ZORK I, II, III TO VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS.

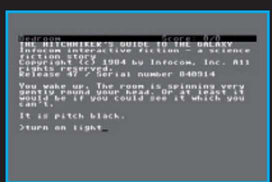
» **RELEASED:** 1979–1984

» **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+ FOR RECENT PC COLLECTIONS; £10+ FOR ORIGINAL INFOCOM RELEASES ON 8-BIT FORMATS.

» Infocom often provided added extras in its boxes – with *Zork I*, you got a history of The Great Underground Empire.



## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS SYSTEMS
**YEAR:** 1984

**LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS**
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS SYSTEMS
**YEAR:** 1986

**THE LURKING HORROR**
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS SYSTEMS
**YEAR:** 1987

they played, so we could see things they tried that didn't work."

As the game grew, so did the parser, and when someone tried to write puzzles and the parser couldn't handle what they wanted to say, it was duly expanded. What the team referred to as 'actors' – characters you could order around – later entered the mix, again driven by puzzles someone wanted to write. The game also started exhibiting basic artificial intelligence via its responses. For example, there's a point where you input 'climb down', only for the game to respond with 'what do you want to climb down?'. A reply of 'rope' is enough for *Zork* to understand your intention, and that your response was related to your original input – sophisticated stuff for the time. "The parser remembering your last utterance and any missing pieces in it was a tricky bit of coding, mostly put in by Marc and Tim," remembers Dave. "It was complex and hard to debug when something happened to make it not work, but it was certainly one of the more advanced parser tricks we had. The technology that remembered it until the next utterance was called the 'orphan parser', because, for example, there was an 'orphan verb' that required a noun but one wasn't supplied by the user. Each possible sentence frame had flags on its slots that said whether it was okay to look around for an 'obvious' answer if there was an orphan—and where to look. So if the rope had been marked to allow that, it would have just filled that in instead of asking."

With Zork's parser being more complex than that of any previous videogame, it was logical that the game's puzzles would follow suit. In part, this was beneficial to the player: in a sense, Zork was an early 'sandbox' game, enabling experimentation via multiple solutions. But Zork's also known for being fiercely tough, and some puzzles are baffling and unreasonable. "Fairness and logic are not words we knew back then," laughs Dave. "Seriously, we created some rather evil puzzles that were what we later called 'guess the word' puzzles. Most of those were cleaned up for the Infocom Zorks, at least." Dave reveals that the team had dozens—possibly even hundreds—of testers who logged into the MIT machine they used over the old Arpanet: "Many of them weren't the least bit shy about telling us things they didn't like about the puzzles, and many of those complaints got fixed!"

Regarding Zork's flexibility, Dave says providing multiple solutions was very important: "We didn't want the game to be too linear—although it certainly had dead-ends. Some areas were necessarily linear, but others you could go around to some extent. It wasn't perfect in that regard, but it was a design goal we kept in mind, and many later Infocom games benefited from those ideas."

Of course, Zork was more than just an early and great text adventure—it was the bedrock on which Infocom was built. Infocom was the master of the genre until commercial viability faded during the era of point-and-click graphical adventures,




» [Live Arcade] Richard Harris believes that the point-and-click adventure dragged text adventures back to the dark ages.

## > Kill genre

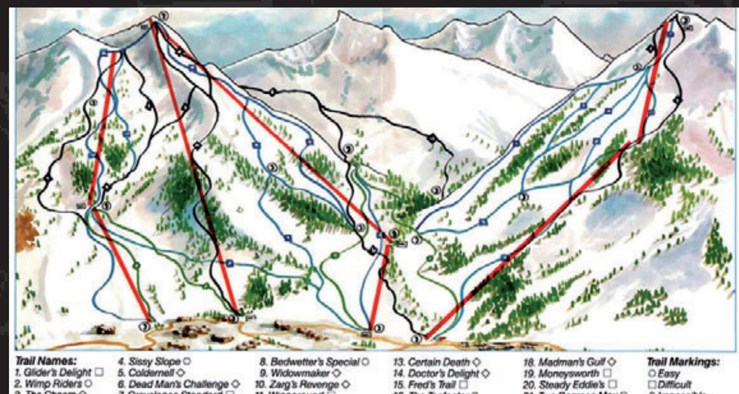
**H2G2 CO-FOUNDER** and all-round clever clogs Richard Harris once wrote that point-and-click games more or less killed off text adventures. On DouglasAdams.com, he argued that as graphics came along, "the computer using portion of the human race forgot all about 500,000 years of language evolution and went straight back to the electronic equivalent of banging rocks together – the point-and-click game. Infocom and most of its competitors went to the wall – signalling the arrival of the post-literate society." You might think Dave would cheerlead such a statement, but he never saw text adventures as having some kind of right to survival, merely that they were just another form of communication. "Although everyone makes much of our parsing ability, it was the story, puzzles and writing that made Infocom. So point-and-click, and graphics – which Harris doesn't mention – versus typing isn't entirely the issue, it's how much you can communicate about your intentions," he says. "More importantly, to grow the form is as much about growing the sorts of stories that can be written as about making complex communication work – they go hand in hand. I suspect if really good speech recognition came about it might spark a revival of parser-based adventures, but on the other hand, speaking to a game even at home might be off-putting to those around you."



» [Z-machine] If you hanker for the original *Zork* experience, grab *dungeon.z5* (a port of the original MIT release) from ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/zcode/.




» *Zork II*'s 'feelies' included a travel guide to Grayslopes, which is apparently the "ultimate ski experience".




and with the bulk of the *Zork* team being company founders, it was a logical step to adapt the PDP-10 title for popular home computers of the day. The decision that most affected the game was reworking it as a three-part series. "Floppy disk space limitations made it necessary to split the mainframe game," explains Dave. "I did the cut and started by taking the mainframe map and guessing how much would fit on the TRS-80 floppy's available game space of about 80k. It turned out to be a pretty decent guess – about two thirds of the rooms and objects. The problems, which weren't insurmountable, came with *Zork II*, which took most of the remaining third." During the project, aspects of geography were extensively reworked, such as the Carousel Room becoming the centre of the map, and puzzles were rewritten and added. "*Zork III* then used the remainder of the content – mostly the End Game – with almost entirely new stuff elsewhere," remembers Dave. "The very last puzzle was used in *Sorcerer*. I'm sure it felt sad and ignored until then!"

In hindsight, *Zork* fans note that each game is distinct – the second title is more plot-oriented than the first and adds spells, and the third game is less straightforward, introducing time-sensitive components. "That was intentional," affirms Dave. "*Zork I* was like the mainframe *Zork*, of course. *Zork II*'s magic was an integral part because I was interested in adding a magic system to the *Zork* universe. *Zork III* was about avoiding traditional 'loot the landscape' puzzles, because Marc was thinking about the whole idea of dungeons and dungeon masters, and scoring by loot and what it meant. So these additions were because we wanted to explore the adventure game form, something we'd taken some distance in the mainframe version but not nearly as far as we wanted to. Much of what Infocom did was motivated that way."

30 years on from co-creating *Zork*, Dave remembers his time working on the game with fondness. "I think my stand-out *Zork* moment was being the first person to play the mainframe version. The first big chunk of the game was written while I was on vacation, and when I came back there was this amazing, magic toy that I got to be the first to play with," he says. "Even though there were bugs, it was incredibly engrossing and fun, and I wanted to write and play more of it."

> "It was obviously the iconic game of its type and has had huge influence"

On the game's longevity, Dave is today both surprised and happy. "If someone had told me *Zork* would still be played 30 years later, I'd have laughed at them, but then I expected true AI would probably exist by then," he jokes. When we ask why Dave reckons *Zork* was so successful in the 1980s (it continued to sell long after its release date) and why it's had such a long life, he posits that it hit a sweet spot of technology, public awareness of personal computers, and our ability to create games for them: "It was obviously the iconic game of its type and has had huge influence. However, had it only appeared on one platform and been hard to port, it would be less remembered". Dave therefore credits much of *Zork*'s success and longevity to the Z-machine architecture developed for Infocom by Marc Blank and Joel Berez. With game code being platform-agnostic and containing Z-machine instructions, games could be ported to a new system simply by writing a Z-machine interpreter – a big advantage during an era of many competing systems, but also a decision that's ensured *Zork* and its ilk's long-term survival. "These old games will outlive other games from their era because they don't need to be rewritten to run on new machines," says Dave, "It sounds boastful, but I expect that as long as computers and English exist, *Zork* and its offspring will be there."

Today, Dave works as a programmer for BAE systems, and we end the interview by asking whether he ever gets the urge to pick up his virtual sword and return to his adventure-gaming roots. "I've been tempted, but mostly about writing treatments and ideas, rather than code," he admits. "It would be fun to design an expansion or zone for *World of Warcraft* – it's got some quite 'Zorkian' quests in terms of complexity and writing. And every now and again, I do play a little of an old game or an amateur Z-language title, but I haven't finished one in ages – I'm a terrible adventurer!"




» Infocom games were so tough the company freely offered tips and maps.



» The map bundled with the 'grey box' *Zork I* release wasn't entirely helpful!

With grateful thanks to The Infocom Gallery (http://infocom.elsewhere.org/gallery/) and The Zork Library (http://thezorklibrary.com) for artwork



# Castlevania

## FANGS FOR NOTHING, KONAMI

» RETROREVIVAL

» N64
» KONAMI
» 1999

**With *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* just around the corner, Hideo Kojima and Mercurysteam certainly have a lot to live up to. After all, Konami's vampire-slaying franchise has been a huge success since its debut in 1986, and it has very rarely ever put a foot wrong. Sadly, when it did make a wrong step, it was of such calamitous proportions that it very nearly put us off the series for good.**

Starting off with a wonderfully eerie image of a young boy playing the violin (accompanied by some truly beautiful music), *Castlevania* slid downhill faster than a bobsleigh team winning gold and proved that even the mighty Konami wasn't infallible.

Plagued by a troubled production – two main characters were dropped in order to ensure the game hit its 1999 deadline – the move to 3D was not a smooth one. Ignoring the intricately designed gameplay of *Symphony of the Night*, *Castlevania* featured a more linear affair that aped the original NES games.

This in itself was fine, but Konami crippled its first 3D *Castlevania* outing with a hyperactive camera that very rarely did what you wanted it to do, spongy controls that made the trademark platforming extremely difficult and large empty grey/brown areas that gave you very little to do.

There were certainly a few clever ideas – a less positive different ending was unlocked if you didn't complete the adventure in a certain number of game days – and new enemies like the motorbike-riding skeletons were certainly a giggle. However, it just wasn't enough. *Castlevania* lumbered from one dull area to the next, and the bland locations, dismal level design and infuriating camera issues were a world away from earlier games in the series. Little wonder that Koji Igarashi was brought back in to get the series back on track again.

*Castlevania* is the perfect example of a developer completely failing to rebottle 2D lightning, and we really do hope that Mercurysteam has played both *Castlevania* and its sequel *Legacy of Darkness* to death. Just to ensure that such a nasty blot never mars one of our favourite franchises again. *


STATUS GOOD
GOLD
99

# SEGA 32X








**How do you take half a decade's worth of critical and commercial success and flush it down the toilet? Easy: you release a device like the Sega 32X. Damien McFerran digs around in the dirt for the truth regarding this most unfortunate of hardware releases**

**At the start of the Nineties, Sega was arguably at the height of its powers. The dawn of the decade saw the Western launch of the popular Mega Drive console, which managed to gain both commercial and critical acclaim – much to the annoyance of arch-rival Nintendo. Such success was not to last, however; in less than a decade, Sega's position would be far less dominant and the firm would be forced to limp meekly out of the hardware arena.**

Why this disastrous fall from grace occurred is very much open to debate, but if you followed Sega's fortunes in the middle of the Nineties one thing is abundantly clear: the company took far too many risks when it came to videogame hardware. The forward-thinking but commercially disappointing Mega-CD represented the first indication that something was amiss, but industry experts point to the positively disastrous retail performance of the Mega Drive's 32X add-on as the real straw that broke the camel's back.

Like the Mega-CD before it, the 32X was a device that augmented the capabilities of the 16-bit Mega Drive, allowing it to perform the kind of 3D graphical tricks that would later become the mainstay of 32-bit consoles. However, by the time the machine was launched it was already being outgunned by Sega's own Saturn, and in less than 12 months it had been dropped from the company's plans altogether. From an outsider's perspective the failure of the 32X was almost a foregone conclusion, so why did Sega choose to sour its relationship with the gaming public just months before it intended to release the Saturn? Scot Bayless, senior producer at Sega of America from 1990 to 1994, is the ideal man to shed some light on this turbulent time because he was there the moment when Sega's American division got the telephone call from Sega of Japan CEO Hayao Nakayama that resulted in the birth of the machine.

"We were at CES '94 in Las Vegas, and Sega of America's head of R&D Joe Miller asked a few of us to join him in his suite for a call he was expecting from Nakayama," remembers Bayless. "There had already been some discussion about an up-gunned Mega Drive with Hideki Sato and his Sega hardware team, but the essence of the call was that we needed to respond to Atari's Jaguar and we needed to do it right away. Joe said he was confident the US team could come up with a design that would do the job, so Nakayama said 'get it done' and we were off to the races. Marty Franz grabbed one of those little hotel notepads and drew a couple of Hitachi SH2 processors, each with its own frame buffer. That's pretty much where the 32X started."

The 32X – which at this juncture was known by the codename Mars - was actually one of two cartridge-based projects in development at the time; the other was known as Jupiter – as the more observant among you will no doubt have noticed by now, Sega had a habit of naming its hardware projects after planets in the solar system.

"Jupiter started as a ROM-based unit with theoretical specs a bit like the Saturn," explains Bayless. Although it was to be a more powerful machine on paper, the emergence of Project Mars meant that Jupiter was ultimately squeezed out of Sega's strategy. "I think Sato was really feeling the cost control heat, and the CD-based Saturn was hugely attractive from a cost perspective," he continues. "Therefore, Jupiter was officially put to bed and Mars was born."

From an engineering standpoint, the machine certainly had a lot of potential. "The design of the graphics subsystem was brilliantly simple; something of a coder's dream for the day," says Bayless. "It was built around two central processors feeding independent frame buffers with twice the depth per pixel of anything else out there. It was a wonderful platform for doing 3D in ways that nobody else was attempting outside the workstation market."

Despite Nakayama's keenness to square up to the Atari Jaguar, the decision to start work on the 32X

> "The Mega-CD indicated that something was amiss, but the 32X was the straw that broke the camel's back

## Specifications

- **Year released:** 1994 (US), 1995 (UK)
- **Original price:** $159.99 (US), £169.99 (UK)
- **Associated magazines:** *Mean Machines Sega, Official Sega Magazine, Sega Power, Mega Tech. MEGA, Sega Pro*
- **Why the 32X was great:** It would be easier to list the reasons why this system was such a failure, but there are some positive things to mention: the increased power allowed for arcade-perfect conversions of *Space Harrier* and *After Burner*, and the 32X version of *Virtua Fighter* captured the essence of the coin-op edition brilliantly. If you didn't have deep enough pockets to afford a Saturn then the 32X was a viable option; it's just a shame that it sold so poorly because the potential was there for true greatness.



# "Frankly, the 32X just made us look greedy and dumb to consumers

was far from straightforward, and within the walls of Sega's Japanese HQ there was much brow-furrowing over the project. This is largely due to the fact that in Japan the Mega Drive had finished in third position behind Nintendo's Super Famicom and NEC's PC Engine, and the consensus was that the company should plough all of its available resources into the 32-bit Saturn. However, Sega of Japan was savvy enough to realise that much of its current wellbeing was down to the incredible commercial performance of its 16-bit hardware in the West, and when Sega of America insisted that it was too early to pull the plug on this large market, Nakayama took notice.

"There was consensus at Sega of America that making an add-on for the Mega Drive was the right move," Bayless explains. "To really understand the decision, though, you need to see it in context: the 32X call was made in early January and Nakayama's mandate was to get to market by the end of the year. I think at the time he lacked confidence that the Saturn would make it to market within 1994."

Although the Mars project was very much Sega of America's baby, Bayless and his team were in constant contact with their Japanese counterparts. "The guys at Sega of Japan were great – especially Sato's team," he says. "We were all in super-double-secret-crunch mode and nerves were wearing pretty thin. I remember one of our technical guys going completely ballistic over his dev kit losing one of its Hitachi SH2 CPU chips and then being told he'd have to wait two weeks to get a new part, but the guys in Japan were awesome. They worked their tails off to help us. We did, however, have a persistent problem with translations of manuals. Sega of Japan had a small localisation team in Tokyo, but those guys were completely slammed. So we started hiring translators in the Bay Area to help open up the technical translation bottleneck – with sometimes amusing results. The engineers in Sato's group were literally sending us the docs as they wrote them and then we were handing them off to contract translators in San Francisco. Technical Japanese is something of a hybrid of English and non-standard uses of Japanese language, and orthodox translations can produce phraseology like: 'The cracker of remembrance receives a tickle from the command of stern ancestor accounting.' It was like a party whenever a new batch came in; we'd read them over lunch and howl."

Although the 32X was meant to enhance the abilities of the Mega Drive hardware – which was half a decade old by this point – it actually shared several similarities with the Saturn. At the heart of both machines were the twin Hitachi SH2 processors, which were included to assist in the creation of complex 3D environments. However, despite sharing the same CPU setup, the way in which the two devices utilised these chips was quite different.

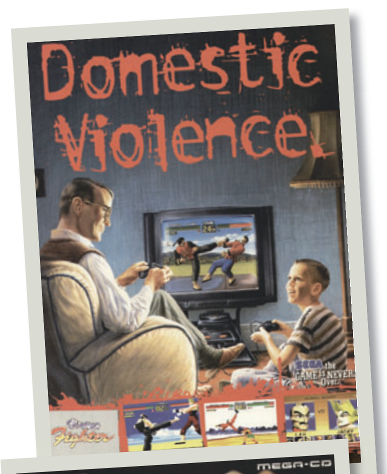
"The Saturn was essentially a 2D system with the ability to move the four corners of a sprite in a way that could simulate projection in 3D space," explains Bayless. "It had the advantage of doing the rendering in hardware, but the rendering scheme also tended to create a lot of problems, and the pixel overwrite rate was very high; much of the advantage of dedicated hardware was lost to memory access stalls. The 32X, on the other hand, did everything in software but gave two fast RISC chips tied to great big frame buffers and complete control to the programmer. To be honest, there's a part of me that wishes the Saturn had adopted the 32X graphics strategy, but that ship had sailed long before the green light call from Nakayama."

When you consider the state of the market at the start of 1994, it becomes a little easier to see why the 32X ever came to be. The 3DO and Atari's aforementioned Jaguar were breaking through and garnering some nervous glances from established firms like Sega and Nintendo; 16-bit games were beginning to look terribly outdated and something was certainly needed to keep the momentum going. Sadly, almost from the start things didn't go according to plan for the 32X: the aforementioned similarity between the machine and its sibling the Saturn caused numerous headaches.



» Sega of America CEO Tom Kalinske fought the 16-bit war but even he couldn't turn the 32X into a success.







» It wasn't long before Sega of Europe reduced the price of the 32X to under £100, along with fellow hardware casualty the Mega-CD.




"Early on, the Saturn launch date was uncertain," says Bayless. "There were a number of issues bearing on launch timing and, while Sega of America was making software for the Saturn, we weren't initially fixed on a launch date. Meanwhile, the 32X had to ramp up like a rocket just to hit its timing. So what happened is the two projects basically ran decoupled from each other, which is fine if there are no dependencies between the two; unfortunately there were tons. The systems used many of the same parts, so suddenly the 32X was facing shortages because chips were needed for the Saturn."

Bayless and his team were essentially attempting the impossible; they were trying to bring a hardware blueprint to life in less than a year and had to fight within Sega to get the resources to accomplish the task. To make matters significantly worse, Sega of Japan dropped a bombshell that essentially wrecked the 32X's chances of any kind of success: "The Saturn got its launch date: November of 1994 in Japan," remembers Bayless with a grimace. Rather than being the forerunner of the Saturn, the 32X now had to face the prospect of sharing the same release window as its 32-bit big brother. "Not surprisingly, word got out quickly in the West," he continues. "US and EU consumers immediately started asking the obvious question: 'Why should I buy a 32X when the Saturn is only a few months away?' Sadly, the best answer Sega could come up with was that the 32X was a 'transitional device' – that it would form a bridge from Mega Drive to Saturn. Frankly, it just made us look greedy and dumb to consumers, something that a year earlier I couldn't have imagined people thinking about us. We were the cool kids."

The early launch of the Saturn had thrown all of Sega of America's already flimsy plans into complete and utter disarray, transforming the 32X from a life-saving blood transfusion for the Mega Drive into a poisonous tumour that would further erode the company's standing in the global marketplace. As Bayless is keen to point out, the timing was horrendous: "Sega of America had a devil of a time convincing anyone that the 32X made sense when the Saturn was just around the corner. Imagine how much harder that would be to sell to the public if the Saturn was already on store shelves."

Despite the obvious setbacks, the 32X experienced a reasonably successful launch in the West. It hit American stores shelves in November 1994, retailing for the substantial sum of $159.99. Regardless of this hefty price tag, the machine shifted its initial shipment of 600,000 units with ease; it was even reported at the time that demand had far outstripped supply. A similar story can be told of the European release, which is unsurprising when you consider how much power Sega still held in PAL territories at the time.



## Q&A

### Marty Franz

**Sega vice president of technology (1993-1997)**

**Retro Gamer: Is it true that you were there the moment Joe Miller got the call from Sega of Japan to produce the 32X machine?**
**Marty Franz:** Yes, I was present at that time. It wasn't really a call from what I remember; it was more like a summons. Joe Miller and Steve Payne flew to Japan and heard about the vision that Hayao Nakayama had. Joe and Steve returned and filled in the team and within a few weeks a small group of us are on an airplane to Japan to discuss the product.

**RG: Is it true that Sega of America created the machine because, unlike Sega Japan, which had given up on the Genesis/Mega Drive following poor domestic sales, it believed that gamers still wanted to continue using their 16-bit machines?**
**MF:** The Saturn was going to be slow to take off due to its price. The 32X was going to add additional life to the 16-bit Mega Drive market. This was good business for Sega since that was where it was earning the most income.

**RG: What, in your opinion, made the 32X such a unique machine?**
**MF:** We pushed really hard for the dual-SH2 architecture. We really liked the Hitachi SH2 CPUs that the Saturn had and felt they were the star of the show. Putting two of them in a package with a good graphics buffer was a big advance at that time; it enabled software rendering tricks that were limited only by the imagination.

**RG: Did the dual development of the 32X and Saturn create any friction within Sega?**
**MF:** It might have in Japan, but I don't remember it causing any friction in the US. I remember the 32X as being a fast-paced development process with a great product produced at the end.

**RG: What was it like working with Sega of Japan at the time?**
**MF:** We had a great working relationship with Sega of Japan. All of us had worked at Sega long enough to know the personalities. We worked as a team even though we had a great deal of distance between us.

**RG: Is it true that the 32X shared some technical similarities with the Saturn?**
**MF:** Only the dual-CPU architecture was lifted from the Saturn. The rest was developed from scratch for the 32X. We had a short timeframe to develop the product and couldn't do much in the way of fixed function hardware development. We had to keep it simple to make the development timeline. We pushed for everything we could imagine that would enable great games in the development timeline we had.

**RG: The sound capabilities of the machine were improved over the Genesis but the games released didn't seem to show this enhancement. Why was this the case?**
**MF:** Developing a new audio engine was probably deemed not worth the investment by developers. The 32X was destined to be a short lifespan product. The developers put the dollars to the screen and saved money by not enhancing the audio.

**RG: Did you ever have much faith in the platform yourself? Even then it seemed like a fairly risky proposition.**
**MF:** It was a neat product, but it was going to have a short shelf life no matter what. The next-generation consoles were going to take over at some point. Sega wanted to extend the life of the Mega Drive as long as it could.

**RG: There was clearly potential in the machine but the opening batch of titles didn't really show off its power. Do you think programmers found it hard because of the complicated relationship between the Genesis and the 32X's processors?**
**MF:** We had a very short development timeline for hardware and software – that didn't help. It also takes developers time to get used to a new platform. We see this with every generation that comes on the market. The developers need a few product cycles to really get their mojo down.

**RG: What do you think killed the 32X in the end?**
**MF:** The move to CD was inevitable. The 32X was destined to die because it didn't have a CD drive and was an add-on. An add-on device is never as well thought out as a built-from-scratch device.




01

## SPACE HARRIER COMPLETE

» **RELEASE:** 1994 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** VIRTUA RACING DELUXE

**Back in 1995** it seemed like commercial suicide to launch a new piece of hardware with a crusty old arcade port from the late Eighties. While *Space Harrier Complete* is a fantastically faithful conversion, it simply wasn't a game that was going to sell the system to gamers. Putting such concerns aside for a moment, this is a fantastic achievement that die-hard Sega fans won't want to miss – even if equally good versions are now available on more modern platforms.



02

## KNUCKLES' CHAOTIX

» **RELEASE:** 1995
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3

**Let's get one** thing perfectly clear: this *Sonic The Hedgehog* spin-off (pun absolutely intended) isn't Sonic Team's finest hour, but having said that it's hardly the worst thing that the company has produced – the 2006 *Sonic The Hedgehog* arguably has that dubious honour. The concept of controlling two characters connected by an elastic band sounds more interesting than it actually is, but there are some neat ideas on display here regardless.



03

## STELLAR ASSAULT

» **RELEASE:** 1995
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZAXXON'S MOTHERBASE 2000

**A forgotten gem** in the 32X library, this 3D space shooter (renamed *Shadow Squadron* in North America) takes inspiration from the likes of *Star Fox* and *X-Wing* to create a surprisingly playable space blaster. It's possibly not as complex as it could be and the visuals tend to look a little basic at times, but it's undeniably enjoyable. On a side note, a Saturn version was also released in Japan and is one of the rarest games in existence.



04

## VIRTUA FIGHTER

» **RELEASE:** 1995
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** AFTER BURNER

**Arguably the jewel** in the 32X's crown, this coin-op conversion of Sega's legendary fighter was outclassed by its Saturn big brother but nevertheless succeeds in carrying across the same compelling gameplay that made the arcade version such a global hit. The sheer volume of moves and techniques on show is incredible, and because it's quite a common game it can be picked up fairly cheaply for aspiring collectors.



05

## STAR WARS ARCADE

» **RELEASE:** 1994
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STAR WARS TRILOGY ARCADE

**Granted, the gameplay** is as shallow as a puddle, but *Star Wars Arcade* is one of those games that actually managed to generate some degree of excitement when it was shown to prospective purchasers back in the mid-Nineties. The 3D visuals are fairly basic but the action zips along smoothly and it has enough of the *Star Wars* spirit to make it truly engaging. Just don't expect a deep or meaningful experience and you'll be fine and dandy.

However, despite this initial interest for the device on both sides of the Atlantic, demand quickly cratered thanks largely to a distinct lack of compelling software. Indeed, it could be argued that the 32X never really saw any games that could truly demonstrate its potential and give it a solid reason for existing.

"Not to be too harsh, but the launch mix for the 32X was horrible," laments Bayless. "Actually, it was non-existent. Some of the games were pretty good, but in context they needed to be amazing. Unfortunately for Sega, by the end of 1994 that context had become a whole lot more demanding. When the PlayStation launched in Japan, any argument in favour of the 32X just sounded ridiculous."




One possible argument is that developers struggled to co-ordinate the internal architecture of the Mega Drive and 32X correctly, which prevented them from pushing the console to its limits. "I don't think complexity was the problem," retorts Bayless. "By then experience with the Mega-CD had taught us orderly ways of spreading the workload across the various buses and chips in the combined system. I think the real issue was timing; the games in the queue were effectively jammed into a box as fast as possible, which meant massive cutting of corners in every conceivable way. Even from the outset, designs of those games were deliberately conservative because of the time crunch. By the time they shipped they were even more conservative; they did nothing to show off what the hardware was capable of."

Taking this chain of events into account, it begs one fairly obvious question: did Bayless ever have any faith in the project at all? "I think the 32X was a great hypothesis," he replies. "But in execution it was disastrous. Aside from the obviously murky marketing message that crippled it before it even launched, everything about the device was rushed. Nine months from a cold start is a ridiculous timeline for launching a new platform; everything about it was slammed together at breakneck speed and the result was exactly what you'd expect. The hardware was flaky, the industrial design questionable, and the games were late or buggy – or both."

Bayless is quick to point out that it wasn't for lack of trying, and he himself dedicated a considerable portion of his time to trying to make the 32X a viable product: "I spent weeks working with id Software's John Carmack, who literally camped out at the Sega of America building in Redwood City trying to get *Doom* ported. That guy worked his ass off and he still had to cut a third of the levels to get it done in time. What amazes me now is that with all that going on nobody at Sega was willing to say: 'Wait a minute, what are we





## Firing Blanks

They say that lightning never strikes twice, but the 32X was just one of several ill-informed hardware ventures that Sega embarked on during the Nineties. The Mega-CD was launched in 1992 and, despite hosting some impressive titles such as *Sonic CD*, *Lunar: The Silver Star* and *Snatcher*, failed to catch on with the Sega faithful. The company also launched an expensive all-in-one Mega Drive and Mega-CD combo called the Multi-Mega. Around the size of a portable CD player, this machine was undeniably sexy but ended up being something of a non-starter. Finally, there was yet another revision of Sega's 16-bit hardware in the shape of the US-only Nomad. Essentially a portable Mega Drive, it was even larger than the already bulky Game Gear and sucked six AA batteries dry in around an hour – unsurprisingly, it didn't trouble the dominance of Nintendo's Game Boy. Ironically, the commercial failure of these platforms and the cachet of the Sega brand has resulted in steep price increases on the second-hand market; both the Multi-Mega and Nomad can sell for many times their original retail price when found boxed and in the right condition.

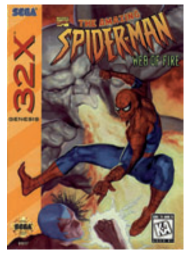


## Three's a crowd

As well as boosting the performance of the Mega Drive, the 32X also had the ability to connect with the Mega-CD to create more impressive CD-ROM titles – that was the hype communicated at the time, at least. In reality, this hellish amalgamation of hardware didn't live up to the propaganda, and those games that were specially coded to take advantage of the setup were mainly poor FMV titles like *Corpse Killer* and *Supreme Warrior*. The controversial *Night Trap* also got a re-release, which featured better quality video, but the gameplay itself remained identical to the Mega-CD original. If the lack of decent games wasn't enough to convince you to disassemble the towering Mega Drive/Mega-CD/32X fusion then the fact that it required three separate power supplies in order to function – one for each component – most certainly was. Looking back, one can understand why Sega was so keen to create all-in-one consoles like the never-released Sega Neptune.

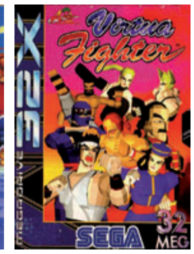


» Since leaving Sega in 1994, Scot Bayless has worked at Capcom, Midway, EA and Microsoft.









## "We stormed the hill and when we got to the top we realised it was the wrong damn hill




» North American ads were almost as bad as the UK ones, as this terrible effort proves.

doing? Why don't we just stop?' Sega should have killed the 32X in the spring of 1994, but we didn't. We stormed the hill and when we got to the top we realised it was the wrong damned hill. Looking back now I'd say that really was the beginning of the end for Sega's credibility as a hardware company."

By the time 1995 arrived, the writing was on the wall for the 32X. Sega of America CEO Tom Kalinske remained bullish, insisting that better titles were on their way, but Bayless feels that he was making hollow claims: "We knew it was DOA. Everybody knew it but nobody would say it. It's a phenomenon that's all too familiar in big companies: people are afraid to speak out against the company's public posture. They're afraid of hurting their colleagues. They want to believe in what they're doing, so they remain silent – but we all knew. I've never spoken to Tom about what was in his head at that point but I suspect he knew as well. But what was he going to do? The chance to stop the 32X had long since come and gone. He had to make the best of the situation he was facing, and admitting publicly that the 32X was a mistake wasn't an option."

Kalinske didn't have to make much of this bad situation for long: in 1995 he left the company. Bayless had already beaten him to it, handing in his notice at the end of 1994. He admits losing faith in Sega as a whole, which is hard for him to disclose. "Even now I feel bad admitting it because I genuinely liked and respected some of the people making those decisions," he explains. "When you look back at the hardware choices the company made between 1992 and 1995 it was like watching the Hindenburg in slow motion. Just about every call the company made turned out to be the wrong one. Using cheap consumer drives in the Mega-CD, FMV games, positioning the 32X as an orphan system, designing the Saturn as a modified last-generation 2D system when clearly 3D was going to be the next big thing… Even Sega's peripherals were stupid. Remember the Activator? Sega VR? The company poured insane amounts of money into projects that didn't make sense, and consumers did what they always do: they voted with their wallets and stayed away."

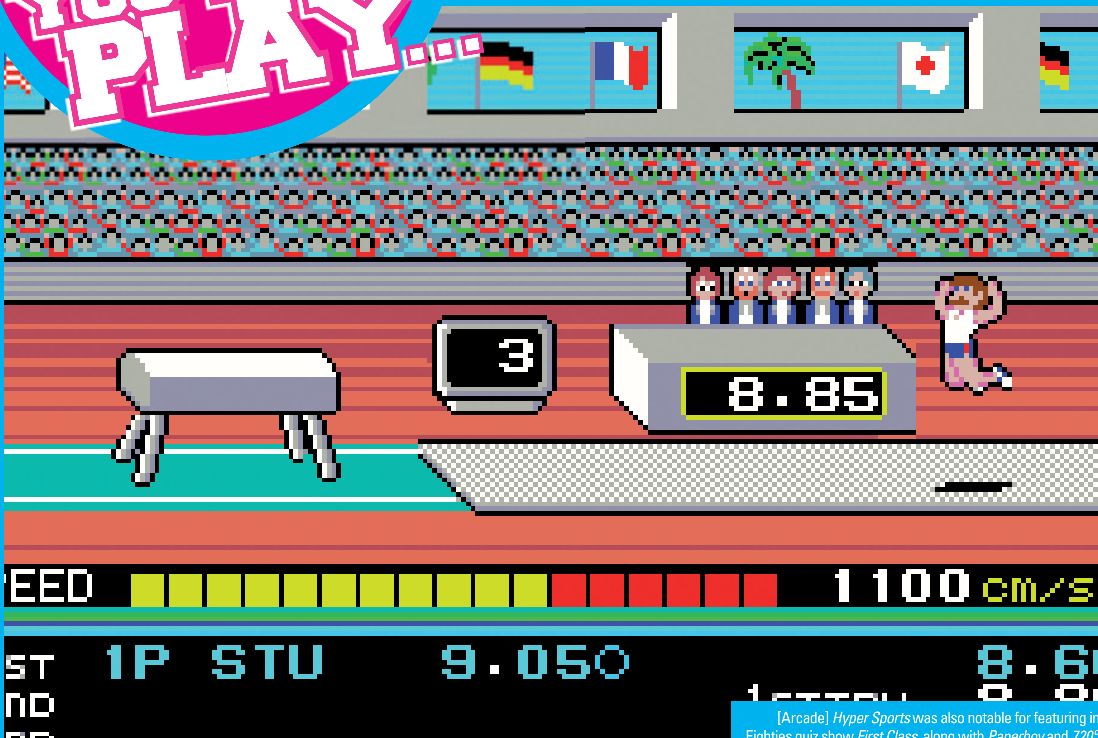
Ultimately, the 32X is a footnote in the history of the industry, but in the eyes of Bayless it represents an important lesson in how not to produce and position a piece of hardware. "The 32X is a great case study in two things," he explains. "First, messaging: your number one job in marketing is to establish the value proposition. Even with all the rushed hardware and late software, if Sega had been able to convince people that the 32X was really worth having, it might have had a chance to succeed. But we never did that; we never managed to explain to anyone in any credible way what was so unique and worthy about the 32X. The result is exactly what you'd expect: Sony ate our lunch. Second: honesty; not in the legal sense, nor in the public sense, but internally. I remember when I arrived at Microsoft in 1998 I attended an executive orientation briefing on my first day. The VP who met with us said: 'The one thing we demand of every one of you guys is to say what you think.' That attitude was what kept Microsoft vibrant, healthy and successful for more than 20 years. Sega, by contrast, lacked that ruthless honesty. Nobody wanted to hurt anyone's feelings. Even when everybody knew the 32X and Saturn were way behind the power curve, nobody was willing to stand up and say so. And it wasn't just the hardware; during the same period, Sega published some of the oddest games it ever released. Games that were deeply flawed. Games that completely failed to connect. And all the while everyone was smiling and saying, 'Gosh, aren't we great?' I wasn't able to articulate all this at the time, but I know I felt it intuitively. I knew there was something wrong, that we were losing our way."

The 32X is also a stark reminder that, while add-ons offer a way of extending the shelf life of consoles, they splinter the market. Bearing this in mind, what does Bayless think about the chances of Microsoft's Project Natal and Sony's PlayStation Move, both of which are due this year? "When I met with Microsoft in 2008 to look at Natal I asked: 'When will you integrate this into the 360?' Their response was: 'We're probably going to wait and see on that.' To which I said: 'Then you're going to fail.' Plays like this always fragment your market and the disincentive to developers is powerful; when I'm spending tens of millions on a game, the last thing I want to do is lose 90 per cent of my market."

They say that those who ignore past mistakes are doomed to repeat them, and clearly Bayless is of the opinion that, rather than being an inconsequential footnote, the 32X should serve as a dire warning to any videogame manufacturer that starts to get ideas above its station.

WHY YOU MUST PLAY…

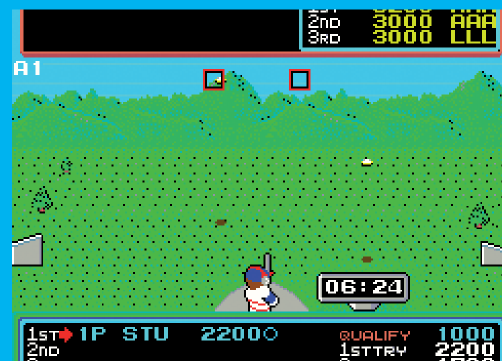
# HYPER SPORTS




[Arcade] *Hyper Sports* was also notable for featuring in Eighties quiz show *First Class*, along with *Paperboy* and *720°*.




[Arcade] Archery was one of the easier events, but even today it's still hugely satisfying to hit a clean round.




[Arcade] Get a good enough run on the skeet shoot, and your little gunman will turn around and give you a grateful wink.

IT MAY NOT HAVE WON AS MANY TEN-PENCE SILVER MEDALS AS TRACK & FIELD BUT STUART HUNT STILL BELIEVES HYPER SPORTS PULLED OFF A VENERABLE PERFORMANCE WHEN IT HOPPED, SKIPPED AND JUMPED INTO ARCADES…



## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £250+

**One of the best things about videogames is that they allow you to be an idiot-savant at most things. Take sports for instance. Your day might involve eating seven bowls of sugar an hour, and you might have the athleticism of a fridge magnet, but neither of that matters in the realm of videogames: if you can pick up a game pad and invest the time to press buttons rapidly then you can become a sporting superstar – in a virtual sense, naturally.**

Released in October 1983, which is a pretty odd time to release a summer athletics game, the original *Track & Field* (named *Hyper Olympics* in Japan) was a humorous cartoon recreation of the world of track and field athletics, one that took six familiar events and transformed them into fun, addictive and finger-exhausting minigames.

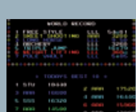
The success found by the original *Track & Field* is really no surprise though. Not only was it responsible for the entire button-bashing, joystick-waggling, controller-mutilating game genre that would inspire games such as *Daley Thompson Decathlon* and Konami's own *Combat School* (aka *Boot Camp*), but it was also cleverly designed to help maximise the impact it would have on the market on its release. It featured chipper looking graphics featuring Nintendo-esque cartoon athletes (the moustachioed men look a lot like lanky, lean Marios), a stupidly simple three-button control system – two buttons for run and one action button (later replaced with a trackball on some cabs) – making it accessible for gamers of any age, and four-player multiplayer action, which not only allowed quadruplets to play an arcade game without bickering but also allowed the game to swallow coins four-times faster than other machines; this factor + good game = recipe for coin-guzzling monster machine, and *Track & Field* was most certainly that.

A year later, Konami decided to follow up the game with an arcade sequel. Oddly opting to use the 'Hyper' name in the West, *Hyper Sports* featured the same graphical style, controls and four-player multiplayer action its predecessor had utilised to so much success, but also boasted a selection of new events and increased the number from six to eight. Those who had mastered the 100 Meter Dash, the Hurdles and Javelin from the

## WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



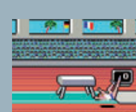
**CONTROLS**
The *Hyper Sports* series stood out for its unique control system, which made it the most accessible coin-op since *Pong*.



**EVENTS**
Konami blessed *Hyper Sports* with a better variety of events than *Track & Field*, they had less of an emphasis on button-mashing.



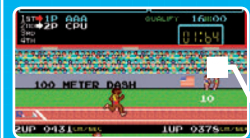
**MULTIPLAYER**
With four-player competitive action, nothing could touch the *Hyper Sports* series on a multiplayer level.



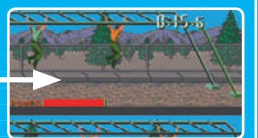
**HUMOUR**
One thing the series is renowned for is its humour. The games didn't take things too seriously, and that was certainly part of their appeal.

## INFLUENCES

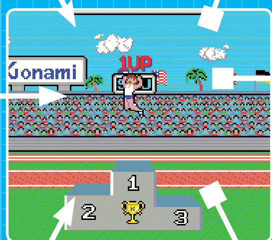
The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Hyper Sports**

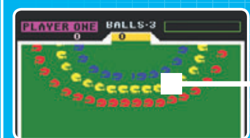


■ **TRACK & FIELD (AKA HYPER OLYMPICS)** (1983)
*Hyper Sports* owes everything to the original game, which came up with the template that the sequel would refine.



■ **COMBAT SCHOOL AKA BOOT CAMP** (1987)
This spiritual cousin to *Hyper Sports* featured similar gameplay, but with the action set inside a boot camp.

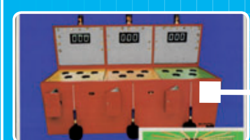




■ **FIELD GOAL** (1979)
*Field Goal* is an American Football-inspired *Breakout* clone by Taito, and could be seen to inspire the sport theme and distilled 'hyper' gameplay.



■ **DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON** (1984)
Ocean's popular series, featuring the endorsement from a medallist, was a response to *Track & Field's* popularity.



■ **WHAC-A-MOLE** (1971)
Owing to *Track & Field's* unorthodox button-bashing control, it's feasible that these early strength/reaction machines provided some inspiration.



■ **ATHLETE KINGS AKA DECATHLETE** (1994)
Sega's superb *Athlete Kings* was a fantastic title that featured *Track & Field's* humour and arcade qualities.

> **"Despite being a fantastic sequel, it failed to garner the same success"**

first game now had even more sporting disciplines from which to contract Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

In *Hyper Sports*, gamers could try to smash qualifying times in Swimming – a button-bashing event similar in style to the 100 Meter Dash from the first game, but now requiring you to manage your little Olympiad's breathing like some kind of birthing partner – test their reactions in Skeet Shooting, Long Horse, Archery, Triple Jump and Pole Vault, as well as pump some heavy-looking virtual iron in the Weight Lifting.

Yet despite being a fantastic sequel, the game failed to garner the same success as its predecessor. We suspect that the dropping of the then-established *Track & Field* brand in the West may have had something to do with it not finding the same size audience on release. Despite this fact, *Hyper Sports* was still ported to a handful of home machines. The most notable is the strange three-part release of the game that graced the MSX system.

A common quirk for many Konami MSX arcade ports at the time, the MSX version (and SG1 conversion) differed significantly from other 8-bit ports by featuring a series of events that had never been seen before in either game: Diving, Trampoline and the Horizontal Bar, accompanied by the Long Horse which did appear.

Confusing matters further, the original *Hyper Sports* events – Skeet Shooting, Archery and Weight Lifting – later appeared in *Hyper Sports II*, and the events Cycling, Curling, the Triple Jump and the Pole Vault (the latter two, of course, pulled wholesale across from *Track & Field*) later made up the events in *Hyper Sports III*. Both sequels were MSX-only releases.

The real beauty of *Hyper Sports* was that it had an effortless appeal among gamers of all ages. Kids liked the lick of humour that Konami instilled into to the game, and enjoyed competing against their mates, while grown-ups enjoyed the skill-development qualities and the physicality of the controls, which helped to make *Hyper Sports* slot comfortably between a videogame and one of those strength-testing machines you'd find muscle headed singlet-wearers knocking nine bells out of fairgrounds. Great graphics, variety gameplay and controls make it a real must-play, even today.

## THE CONVERSIONS

**How the various versions compare**



### 1 COMMODORE 64

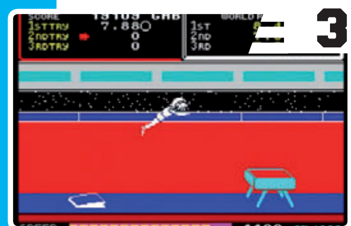
BEST VERSION

The C64 just pips the Speccy port in our opinion. This is easily one of the best arcade conversions to appear on the machine, with the beige beast turning out a nigh-on perfect arcade port. Great graphics and presentation, and all the events bar the Pole Vault make this the best conversion.



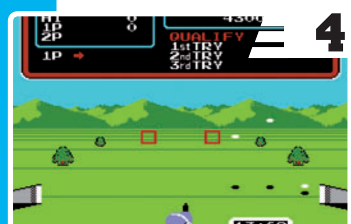
### 2 AMSTRAD CPC

The CPC turns out a venerable port of *Hyper Sports*. As you'd expect, it certainly looks the part, with the game making the most of Arnold's effusive colour palette. The only fly in the ointment is the controls, which we found didn't feel as responsive as the C64 and Spectrum ports.



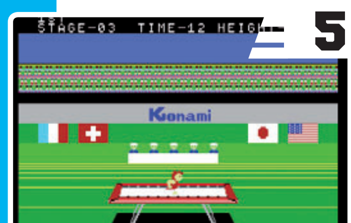
### 3 SPECTRUM

Considering Joffa Smith was responsible for this port you'd expect quality, and it's definitely that; only missing the Pole Vault from the coin-op's line-up, this is a great conversion. Letting things down are some functional graphics and truly weird sound effects (the crowd's applause kinda sounds like a bomb going off in a zoo).



### 4 NES

The NES port is another *Hyper Sports* oddity. Easily the best-looking port, the machine does an effortless job of recreating the arcade games already NES-style visuals, but letting things down is the paltry amount of events: you just get Skeet Jump, Triple Jump, Archery and High Jump.

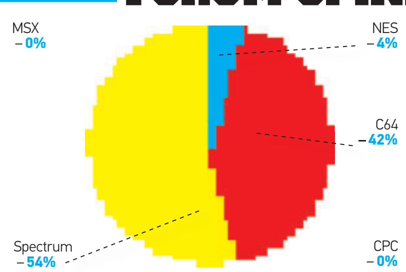


### 5 MSX

WORST VERSION

The peculiar conversion of *Hyper Sports* features just four events, three of which never appeared in *Track & Field* or *Hyper Sports*: Diving, Trampoline and Horizontal Bar. Nice animation, but washed out colours and small number of events let this port down.

## FORUM OPINION




Both Spectrum and C64 are good, but the C64 edges it by being closer to the arcade, and featuring that superb 'Chariots of Fire' rendition by Martin Galway. – **fgasking**

ZX Spectrum by a long way. I played the arse off that back in the day! Superb playability. Oh, and you had to play with keys to be any good I reckon. – **C=Style**




FROM THE ARCHIVES

**RETRO GAMER** DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

# Hewson Consultants

Richard Hewison rediscovers the surprisingly prolific publisher Hewson Consultants, which had a huge and underestimated influence on 8-bit gaming in the UK during the Eighties

**Hewson Consultants was born in Blewbury, Oxfordshire, at the very start of the UK home microcomputer boom, although founder and managing director Andrew Hewson had first-hand computer experience long before then, as he recalls.**

"My first real contact with computers was in the radiocarbon lab at the British Museum research laboratory. I joined in December 1972 and the lab acquired a Hewlett-Packard 2100. I was given the job of converting an ALGOL batch program into Fortran 4 on the new machine."

Having qualified as a statistician, Andrew left the British Museum and moved to Oxfordshire in 1979 to work for the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). It was in the autumn of the following year that Sinclair first advertised the £99 ZX80 computer kit.

"I wanted to buy one but by this time I had a family and a mortgage, so I decided that I was going to earn enough from the ZX80 to pay for the machine and the bits that it required," says Andrew. His academic background had given him valuable experience of writing, but he had also suffered from writer's block. To prove that he was over it, he decided to write a book about what he had discovered using his newly acquired ZX80 computer.

"The machine came with an instruction manual that covered the 8K ROM, and it wasn't long before I was manipulating the system variables and observing the effects," remembers Andrew. He bought a second-hand typewriter and his wife Janet typed up what he had written down. She drew a picture of the ZX80 for the cover and Andrew used Letraset to add the title *Hints And Tips For The ZX80 By Andrew Hewson* on the front. One hundred books were printed and Andrew paid for two small adverts in *Practical Computing* and *Personal Computer World*.

"The ads worked," says Andrew with some satisfaction. "Letters started arriving enclosing cheques for £3.95. It's impossible to describe how weird it felt to pick envelopes off the mat and find cheques and cash from people you didn't know!"

Despite the home-made quality, the book made a profit and was even reprinted. Coupled with some written academic consultancy work on the side, Hewson Consultants was up and running.

## No game plan

Andrew followed up his debut computer book with another called *Hints And Tips For The ZX81*. This time he was more confident of the demand and he found writing about the new machine much easier.

"The ZX81 book more or less wrote itself and I spent a bit more time and effort on the layout, printing and production," he explains. "Nobody could call it a work of art but it sold well enough by mail order and kept the cheques flowing in."

By then, running Hewson Consultants and working for NERC had become a handful, so family members were drafted, starting with Andrew's brother.

"We received programs for evaluation on a daily basis, so I asked my younger brother

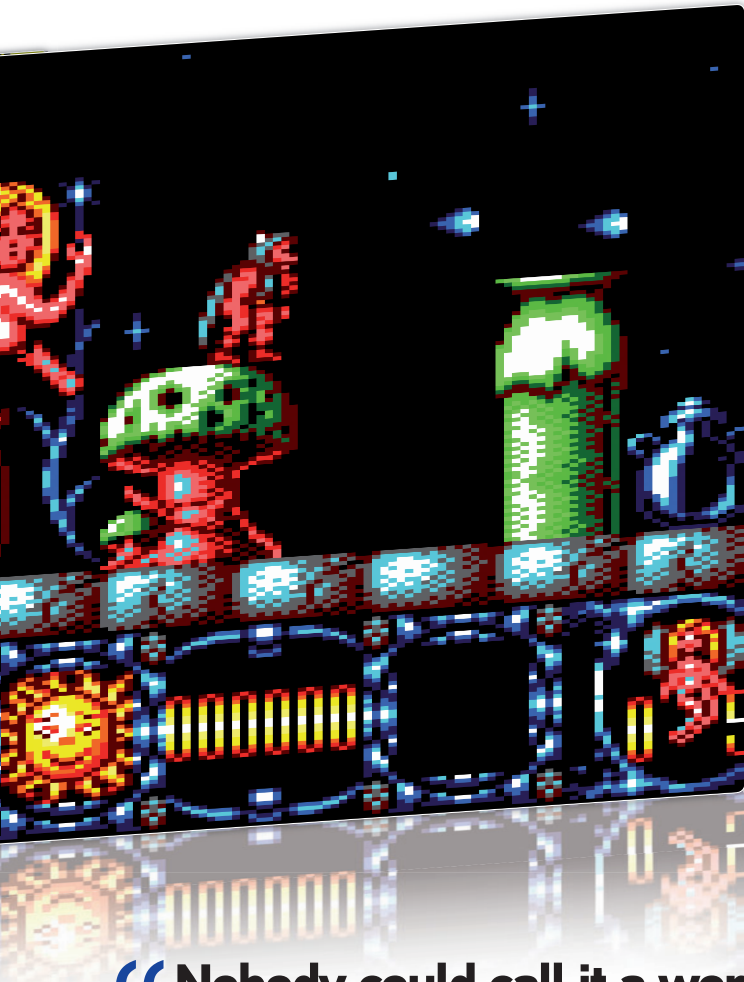
### INSTANT EXPERT

**In late 1985**, a new 'Hewson' logo was introduced to all packaging, which dropped the word 'Consultants'. The company name was still Hewson Consultants, but the shorter name allowed for a more stylised and dynamic logo, which changed twice more over the next five years.

**In 1987, Andrew** was persuaded to enter the 8-bit budget market, signing a deal with Mastertronic. It published old back catalogue titles from Hewson and Gargoyle Games on the 'Rebound' label, alongside new games on the 'Rack 'It' label, including enhanced versions of previous Graftgold hits *Uridium*, *Paradroid* and *Gribbly's Day Out*. Although not a complete disaster, neither label made much business for Hewson or Mastertronic, and after a few years they were laid to rest.

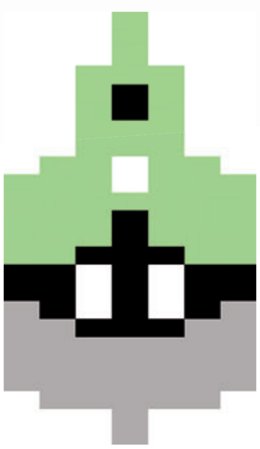
**Hewson published a** number of compilations in the last few years covering most of its bestselling titles. Titles like *Uridium*, *Rana Rama*, *Cybernoid* and *Cybernoid II* in particular cropped up more than once as Hewson tried to squeeze every last penny out of its 8-bit games portfolio.

**Gordon Hewson quit** working for Hewson Consultants in 1987, and programmer John M Phillips stepped in to help evaluate all the games that were still being submitted by eager programmers.



**"Nobody could call it a work of art, but it sold well enough by mail order"**

ANDREW HEWSON COMMENTS ON THE SUCCESS OF HIS ZX81 BOOK



Gordon to work for the company, and he proved a dab hand at sifting out the very best. He had an eye for interesting, quality product and I had the technical background, so we made a good team."

Hewson Consultants' early product range consisted of Andrew's books, some ZX81 utilities and some ZX81 memory expansion peripherals. The only game was *16K Space Intruders*, which was a *Space Invaders* clone, but was it the first official Hewson Consultants game?

"No. The first game was *Lunar Lander*," reveals Andrew with a flourish. "I got the idea from an electronic calculator. I wrote it in BASIC and published it at the back of my *Hints And Tips For The ZX80* book. I even sold a few copies on cassette."

Andrew admits that games weren't originally part of the long-term business plan: "I've never been much of a computer gamer. I've always been much more interested in the technology itself. The truth is that without Gordon we wouldn't have put the effort into signing game authors. I'd have been just as happy writing more books."

Despite this, games began to become more important to the business. In 1982 more ZX81 games were published including *Naval Blockade* and *Puckman*, written by John Hardman. John went on to co-author a book with Andrew called *40 Best Machine Code Routines For The ZX Spectrum*, which won 'Best Computer Book 1984' at the Computer Trade Association Awards. He also wrote some Spectrum games, including *Spectral Panic* and *Maze Chase*.

Andrew was originally running Hewson Consultants from his spare bedroom, but found it hard to switch off and would often work through until 4am and then go to work at NERC a few hours later. In mid-1982 he rented a one-room office above the printers in Wallingford where his books had been produced. By the summer, the ZX81 range had expanded again to include a flight simulator submitted by keen amateur programmer Mike Male.

"I first got in touch with Andrew because I had read his book about programming the Z80 chip using assembly language," explains Mike. "I started by writing a very simple flight simulator for the expanded 16K ZX81 called *Pilot*. At the time I was working at Heathrow Airport as an air traffic controller, so writing a flight simulator seemed an obvious step."

*Pilot* was duly published and was the start of a busy and fruitful working relationship between Mike and Andrew, resulting in the games *Night Flight*, *Night Flight II*, *Backgammon*, *Heathrow ATC*, and the steam engine simulators *Southern Belle* and *Evening Star*. Mike's games sold over 100,000 copies, so Andrew gave him a golden cassette to commemorate the achievement, with the story and a photograph sent to all of the major computer magazines.

"I remember we got a write-up in one magazine accusing us of being 'brazen back slappers of the week'!" says Mike with a laugh. "But there is no such thing as bad publicity."

Hewson Consultants' entry into ZX Spectrum publishing came soon after the 16K model was launched. Andrew wrote a *20 Best Programs For The ZX Spectrum* book, and new Spectrum games included Kim Topley's illustrated text adventure called *Quest*, which he followed up with another called *Fantasia Diamond*, which went on to win 'Best Game Scenario' in the prestigious French Grand Prix Internationale du Logiciel d'Adventure awards.

Teenager Simon Cobb wrote *Grid Patrol*, which was published under the name *Di-Lithium Lift*; John Fitzgerald wrote the educational title *Countries Of The World*; and Clive Brooker wrote *Knight Driver*. By then, the utilities and the hardware add-ons had gone. Games and the occasional book had become Hewson's best sellers.

## Turning graft into gold

1983 proved to be an important year for a number of reasons. Firstly, Andrew quit NERC and worked at Hewson full-time. As the company became more successful, the one-room office expanded into two, and they also employed additional staff, including Debbie Sillitoe, who joined part-time in marketing.

Another key event that year was the submission of a 16K Spectrum game from ST Software called *3D Space Wars*. Written by commercial programmer and arcade enthusiast Steve Turner, it turned out to be the first in a trilogy of Spectrum games.

Steve Turner soon employed fellow friend, musician and arcade fanatic Andrew Braybrook to convert his trilogy to the Dragon 32. Braybrook was working at Marconi at the time and found the idea of programming games for a living far more appealing. Sadly, his conversions didn't sell in any great numbers, but he quickly switched allegiance to the Commodore 64, where he found his true calling. The first result of Braybrook's solo endeavours was the arcade platformer *Gribbly's Day Out*.

"It was brilliantly original," remembers Andrew Hewson, "but the game never got the full recognition that it deserved, probably because it was so unusual that many people missed it."

While Andrew Braybrook was carving himself a reputation on the Commodore 64, Steve Turner was working hard on a new 3D arcade adventure game for the 48K Spectrum called *Avalon*.

"There's no doubt in my mind that Steve Turner was one of the elite programmers of his day," remembers Hewson. "He and I struck up a good relationship from the very beginning. He was original, creative and dedicated, and the products he delivered were stunning. I thought *Avalon* was head and shoulders above all the over ZX Spectrum games around at the time and would be remarkable even to this day."

*Avalon* was a big success, and paved the way for a sequel called *Dragontorc*, which was also a big seller. ST Software eventually became Graftgold, and its partnership with Hewson flourished.

## Adventures in Abingdon

Hewson Consultants' growing success resulted in a move in late 1983 from the ▶

## BY THE NUMBERS

**3** versions of *Paradroid* were published by Hewson for the Commodore 64: the original, the 'Competition Edition' (also known as *Fast Paradroid*) and finally *Heavy Metal Paradroid*, on the 'Rack 'It' budget label.

**12** was the number of years that Hewson survived as a book and software publisher.

**93** editions of Andrew Hewson's monthly Helpline column for *Sinclair User* magazine were written between April 1982 and December 1989.

**100** copies of Andrew's ZX80 book were initially produced.

**£500** was how much Andrew spent to start the company.

**£5,000** was how much money it cost Andrew Hewson to attend the Telecomsoft litigation hearing.

**100,000** copies of *Night Flight II* and *Heathrow ATC* were sold by September 1984.



[Spectrum] Steve Turner's fun *Rana Rama* for the Spectrum was unfairly compared to *Gauntlet*.

**TIMELINE**

**1980** – *HINTS AND TIPS FOR THE ZX80* IS PUBLISHED. HEWSON CONSULTANTS IS BORN.

**1981** – *HINTS AND TIPS FOR THE ZX81* IS PUBLISHED. HEWSON ALSO SELLS ZX81 SOFTWARE AND PERIPHERALS.

**1982** – ANDREW HEWSON RENTS A SMALL OFFICE IN WALLINGFORD. MORE ZX81 SOFTWARE IS DEVELOPED.

## "I could immediately see that this was a great way to promote a game"

ANDREW HEWSON'S REACTION TO A DEVELOPER'S DIARY FOR PARADROID

### PARANOID ANDROIDS

Andrew Braybrook's classic game was called *Paradroid* – an amalgamation of 'paranoid androids' – because the other 'droids in the game were all out to get you.

Aside from the three Commodore 64 versions and Steve Turner's 3D homage on the Spectrum in the form of *Quazatron*, Hewson also got to publish 16-bit versions of *Paradroid* in late 1989 in the form of *Paradroid '90*, which was a spruced-up effort for the more demanding ST and Amiga players, coded by Andrew Braybrook and Dominic Robinson, who left Hewson to work for Graftgold in late 1987.

Hewson and Graftgold partially patched up their differences to collaborate on this new version of Andrew Braybrook's classic game, and Graftgold also contributed a few titles to Hewson's 'Rack It' budget range. Steve Turner wasn't entirely happy with the arrangement, though, as to make the deal pay dividends its budget games would have had to sell in huge quantities at a time when the 8-bit market was on a large downward spiral.

In the end, Hewson and Graftgold's reunion lasted just three titles before they all moved on once again, for the last time.

small offices in Wallingford to much larger industrial premises in Abingdon, just nine miles away.

"You didn't have to be a genius to work out that the office in Wallingford was too small," explains Andrew. "We were all shoe-horned into two rooms with the stock in a back room over the staircase."

The move to Abingdon allowed the business to expand on a number of fronts, including the chance to invest in some new hardware.

"By then we could justify running our own cassette duplication plant, so I brought my father in because I knew he would be able to run the plant successfully," says Andrew. But was it a good move? "It made sense for family reasons. I'm not sure it made sense completely in business terms but it gave us great flexibility in responding to demand."

Andrew was also able to create an in-house programming team, which was something he had planned for a while.

"I put the money I had earned from my books into backing some programmers who I thought had great potential. We had quite a lot of work available converting titles from one platform to another but it was very much a case of trying to fit the people and their skills and knowledge to the work."

### Paradroid and Uridium

Andrew Braybrook's next two games for Hewson were *Paradroid* and *Uridium*, both for the Commodore 64. The former game got a lot of pre-release publicity thanks to a diary written by Andrew Braybrook, which was published during 1985 in a brand new computer magazine.

"I was visiting the editor of *Zzap!64* to talk about what we had coming next and he asked if they could publish a diary about a game we had under development," recalls Andrew Hewson happily. "I could immediately see that this was a great way to promote a game and I leapt at the opportunity while pretending for half an hour or so not to appear too keen!"

The success of the diary and the finished game put Andrew Braybrook on the map, and both *Paradroid* and its programmer went on to win significant awards that year. Thankfully he immediately started working on a sideways scrolling shoot-'em-up, which ultimately proved to be his crowning glory for Hewson.

"*Uridium* was simpler than *Paradroid* in that it had no significant back story, but technically it was superb and the balance was fantastic," extols Andrew Hewson. "The music, the action sequences and the graphics all functioned together to create a whole that was much greater than the sum of the parts."

However, the amount of effort that was needed from Hewson to get *Uridium* released on time was phenomenal.

"We knew from the magazine reaction and the advance orders that *Uridium* was going to be a big hit, and we had worked through the night to get the product packed and ready to go," says Andrew. "I got home late still full of nervous energy but in the space of a few hours I went from huge elation to deep despondency. We had all worked flat-out to put the product at the top of the charts, but I simply couldn't imagine ever being able to summon the energy or willpower to repeat the feat."

### The talent magnet

Hewson was consistently publishing impressive games for the Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC, and the company's reputation was continuing to grow. As a result, it was able to attract more top-notch 8-bit programming talent, including the likes of former Mikro-Gen stalwart Raffaele Cecco, who wrote a handful of trademark colourful arcade games including *Exolon*, two *Cybernoid* games and a pair of *Stormlord* titles. Newcomer John M Phillips, Steve Crow of *Starquake* fame, and Commodore 64 games guru Jeff Minter also produced games for Hewson.

"Jeff lived within 20 miles or so and I went to visit him," says Andrew. "I worked closely with Raf and John but Jeff was a bit of a loner and we never really found any common ground."

In the end, only one Jeff Minter game was published by Hewson: the colourful and sometimes perplexing Commodore 64 split-screen shooter *Iridis Alpha*. Other Hewson games included platformers *Technician Ted* and *City Slickers* from duo Steve Marsden and Dave Cooke, and shoot-'em-up *Gun Runner* from Christian Urquhart and Mike Smith.

Dominic Robinson was a Z80 programmer who had written a four-way scrolling demo on the Spectrum, hoping to persuade Hewson to let him write a




[Amiga] *Paradroid '90* enhanced the original game to meet the demands of the Amiga audience.




[Spectrum] *Pyracurse* was Hewson's first attempt to create an in-house developed game.

**1983** – ANDREW HEWSON QUITS HIS DAY JOB TO RUN HEWSON CONSULTANTS FULL-TIME. STEVE TURNER SUBMITS *3D SPACE WARS*.

**1983** – HEWSON MOVES TO LARGER PREMISES, INVESTS IN A TAPE DUPLICATION FACILITY AND ASSEMBLES AN IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM.

**1984** – HEWSON PUBLISHES A PLETHORA OF GAMES, INCLUDING *AVALON* BY STEVE TURNER. MIKE MALE'S SIMULATORS SELL OVER 100,000 COPIES COMBINED.

**1985** – HEWSON PUBLISHES *GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT* AND CONTINUES PROLIFIC RELEASES ACROSS ALL MAJOR 8-BIT FORMATS.

**1985** – *ZZAP!64* PUBLISHES A FIVE-PART DEVELOPMENT DIARY FOR *PARADROID*. THE GAME IS A BIG HIT WHEN RELEASED.

**1986** – *URIDIUM* IS A HUGE SELLER BUT FINANCES ARE TIGHT AND SOME IN-HOUSE DEVELOPERS ARE LAID OFF.

**1987** – NEW GAMES FROM JOHN M PHILLIPS, DOMINIC ROBINSON AND RAF CECCO ARE PUBLISHED.

**1987** – GRAFTGOLD TAKES *MORPHEUS* AND *MAGNETRON* TO TELECOMSOFT, RESULTING IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS.

**1987** – HEWSON CREATES TWO BUDGET LABELS AND EMBARKS ON 16-BIT CONVERSIONS OF 8-BIT GAMES.

**1988** – HEWSON AND TELECOMSOFT SETTLE OUT OF COURT. NEW 8-BIT/16-BIT GAMES INCLUDE *CYBERNOID* BY RAF CECCO.

**1989** – HEWSON FINALLY RELEASES SOME ORIGINAL 16-BIT GAMES, INCLUDING *ONSLAUGHT* AND *CUSTODIAN*.

**1990** – 8-BIT COMPILATIONS OF OLD HITS KEEP HEWSON GOING.

**1991** – ANDREW HEWSON CLOSES HEWSON CONSULTANTS IN APRIL DUE TO LACK OF FINANCE.

Spectrum version of *Uridium*. Dom saw a job advert for a 6502 programmer at Hewson and decided to get in touch.

"I applied for the job despite never having written a line of 6502 in my life and hoping to blag it! I was really a Z80 expert," remembers Dom with a wry smile. "The position went to John Cummings, a Glaswegian who I went on to work with in a number of companies over the next five years or so."

However, unperturbed by the original rejection, Dom got a second chance when Hewson needed a Z80 programmer shortly afterwards: "In the end I was hired on the strength of the Spectrum code I had showed them. I ended up doing a wide range of jobs – code, graphics and level design – for *Pyracurse* before I eventually moved on to write *Uridium*."

*Pyracurse* started as a game idea from Andrew Hewson. Originally set in Egypt and called *Sphinx*, it was worked on by Dom, Keith Prosser and Mark Goodall, who were part of Hewson's in-house development team at the time. Keith had previously written Hewson's Amstrad CPC Z80 assembly programming package Zapp. However, once *Pyracurse* was completed, the in-house programming team was broken up, with only the newcomers Dom Robinson and John Cummings left.

"That game was my attempt to create a programming team who could produce original material and, to be fair, they got pretty close," says Andrew. "It was technically clever but visually it was never going to set the world alight. It also ran way over budget and by the time it was ready to ship we were financially stretched and so I had to lay people off. As you can imagine, doing so didn't earn me any friends, but it had to be done."

## Portakabin fervour

"Throughout most of this period we worked in a yellow Portakabin in the car park behind the main warehouse," remembers Dom. "We had moved out of the development office while it was redecorated, but once it was finished the marketing people moved in. As it turns out, this was great for us, as the Portakabin was 'out of sight, out of mind', so we had plenty of peace and quiet and no complaints about the loud music!"

Dom wrote the highly acclaimed Spectrum version of *Uridium* in the Portakabin with input from John on the modified level designs. Once that was finished, Andrew Hewson challenged Dom to write a shoot-'em-up for the Spectrum that was fast, had lots of colour and no attribute clash. The result was the impressive *Zynaps*, which was then converted to other platforms by John Cummings for the C64 and Michael 'Mel' Croucher, who had previously ported *Uridium* to run on the Amstrad CPC.

"I remember it as a hugely enjoyable period. The hours were long, but we loved what we were doing and had a great laugh doing it," says Dom.

## Rotating towers

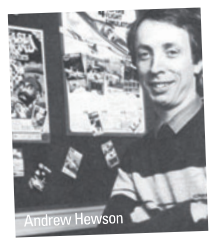
While the Commodore Amiga and the Atari ST were starting to make an impression elsewhere, the strong 8-bit games kept coming for Hewson. John M Phillips' first effort was the technically neat *Impossaball* 3D puzzle game, but his next title made a much bigger impression.

"John produced a rotating cylinder on the Commodore 64 with a sine wave passing across the top of it," explains Hewson. "I didn't see a game in it but it was suggested that he try turning the cylinder through 90 degrees."

The result was a vertical rotating cylinder. John added sprites running across the front of it, and he planned to link multiple cylindrical towers together to form battlements, but Andrew thought that approach was unnecessarily complicated.

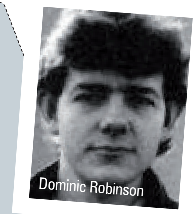
"At the time I was still in thrall to the magic simplicity of *Uridium*, so I made a ▶

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?


Andrew Hewson

**Andrew Hewson** dropped out of the games industry a number of years ago and is still trying to develop a personal perspective on everything. These days he keeps himself busy and has also recently become a grandfather for the first time.

**Mike Male** went on to establish Micro Nav Ltd in 1988, a company developing and supplying air traffic control and fighter control simulators and training systems. Mike is still at Micro Nav today, where he is CEO. "My experience with Andrew Hewson was great throughout. He was always encouraging me, he liked the more serious games that I was producing, and it was pretty lucrative at the time. It was also gratifying to have sold the many thousands of copies of each program that we did, and certainly the extra income was nice!"

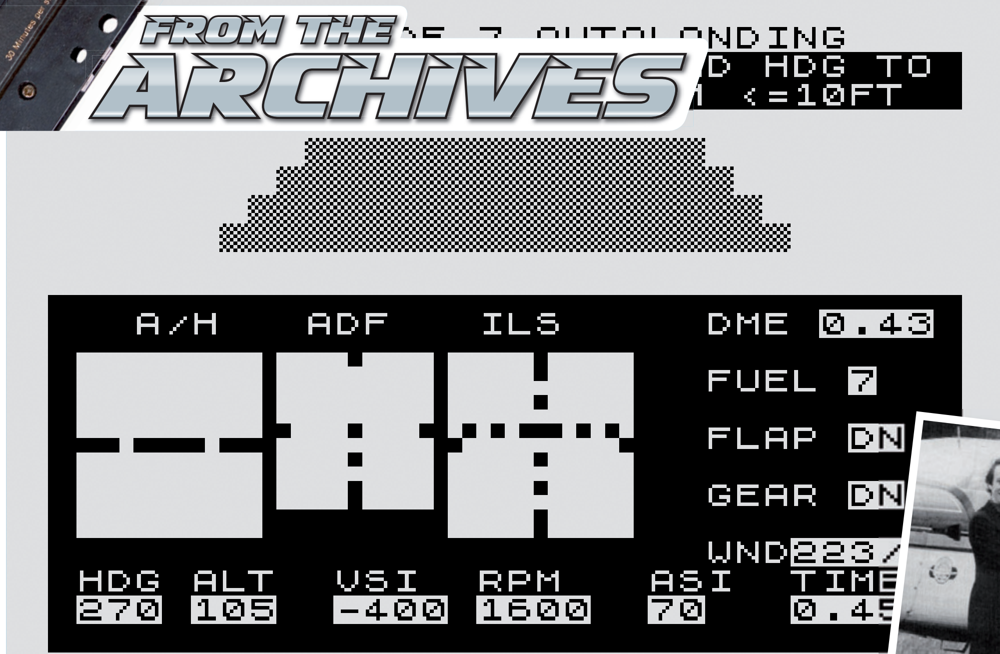

Dominic Robinson

**Dominic Robinson** worked for a number of different developers after he left Hewson, but today he works at SN Systems as a principal software engineer. SN Systems has been part of the Sony Computer Entertainment Group since 2005, providing PS2, PS3 and PSP development tools for console game programmers worldwide.

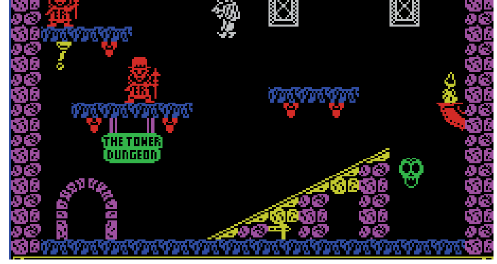

Mike Male



[C64] *Gribbly's Day Out* on the C64 was a wacky and technically excellent platform game by Andrew Braybrook.




[ZX81] *Pilot*, the 16K flight simulator for the ZX81, was impressive.












> **"I think the bottom line is that it's actually extraordinarily difficult to maintain a creative edge"** ANDREW HEWSON EXPLAINING HEWSON'S ULTIMATE DEMISE

few suggestions," he remembers. Among them was that the basic premise should be to climb to the top of each tower via a series of platforms and that there should be a short break before moving on to the next one.

Hewson showed off *Nebulus* at the PC Show in September 1987 and it got some attention, as Andrew explains: "I remember Julian Rignall coming along to check out what we had to offer. The game was static on the screen and he picked up the joystick and starting moving it. The tower rotated and I saw him lean forward, eyes wide open at what had just happened. I thought: 'That's it! Sold!'"

## The Morpheus Manoeuvre

Throughout 1987, there were rumblings that Hewson was heading for financial trouble. These rumours resulted in Graftgold becoming twitchy over the stability of its sole publisher. With no actual contract to tie *Magnetron* and *Morpheus* to a publisher, Graftgold signed a deal with Telecomsoft, the software division of BT. Over 20 years later, Andrew Hewson is finally able to shed some light on what happened from his perspective.

"When *Morpheus* came along I had truly serious doubts. I diligently listened to Andrew Braybrook explaining the game, but I could not for the life of me see the entertainment value. I'm not sure how Steve felt. I suspect he had his doubts as well but felt that between them they could pull the rabbit out of the hat."

Those doubts meant that when Telecomsoft signed *Morpheus*, Andrew wasn't too worried. However, Graftgold had previously given Hewson an unfinished version of the game, and this is what triggered the infamous legal action, as Andrew remembers.

"BT took out an ex parte injunction against us to prevent us from doing what it would never occur to me to do anyway: to ship an unfinished game. At the eventual injunction hearing, we told the judge we were not remotely interested in releasing an unfinished product. He accepted the argument but ruled that BT had more money than we did and therefore the injunction could stand because they could pay us any likely amount of damages if we won but the converse might not be true," says Andrew with a shrug.

So what happened? Life carried on as normal for six months and then Andrew Hewson contacted Paula Byrne at Telecomsoft and they agreed to settle out of court over an Indian meal in the heart of London. Andrew recounts: "BT were on a hook of their own making and were happy enough to be allowed to wriggle off it."

The outcome was that Telecomsoft eventually published *Morpheus* for the Commodore 64 as well as Steve Turner's *Magnetron* for the Spectrum. More significantly for Andrew, it ended the working relationship that Hewson and Graftgold had enjoyed over the last three or four years.



### FAMILY MATTERS

Andrew Hewson involved his wife Janet, his younger brother Gordon, and his father, who had been an industrial chemist working for Marconi, during Hewson Consultants' 11-year existence between 1980 and 1991. Although he no longer has any involvement in the industry today, the Hewson influence continues thanks to Andrew's son Robert, a senior creative designer for American developer Dark Energy Digital, which is currently applying the finishing touches to its upcoming Xbox 360 game *Hydrophobia*.



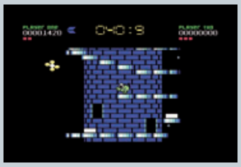


Mike Male being presented with a framed gold cassette.

## SIX OF THE BEST



### Avalon
Steve Turner's 3D adventure was a revelation. The astral projection of the wizard Maroc floated around locations collecting objects, casting spells and trying to avoid foes. It spawned an even larger sequel called *Dragontorc*.



### Nebulus
*Nebulus* was technically unique, simple to play and had that elusive 'just one more go' quality. Released as *Tower Toppler* in the US, it also 'inspired' a level in the *Mickey Mania* console game a few years later.



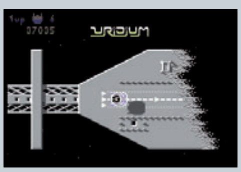
### Paradroid
Steer your robot, grapple with other droids and upgrade as you attempt to clear each deck in this hugely enjoyable experience. The best version is the 'Competition Edition', which is faster and less glitchy than the original release.



### Quazatron
Effectively *Paradroid* for the Spectrum but in 3D, this game from Steve Turner might have suffered from some jerky scrolling but was otherwise just as enjoyable as the Commodore 64 original that inspired it.




### Southern Belle
Steam engine simulators aren't going to be for everyone, but if it's your thing, *Southern Belle* was worth a go. Simulating the powerful King Arthur Class 4-6-0, Bob Hillyer and Mike Male took the player on a journey from London Victoria to Brighton.




### Uridium
A simple but elegant shoot-'em-up. Fly your Manta over each Super-Dreadnought, blasting everything that moves. The C64 original is the best, but the Spectrum version is far better than it should have been. An absolute classic.

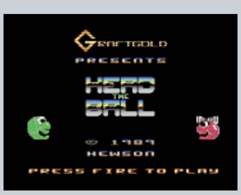
## THREE TO AVOID



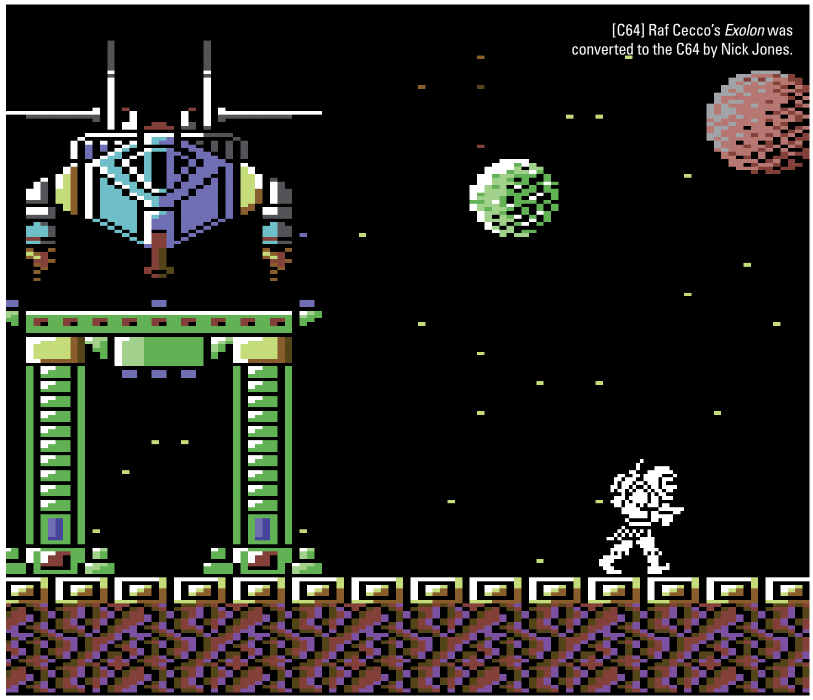
### Future Basketball
A very poor *Speedball* clone for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga. Average graphics, poor animation and very little originality meant that this game never really stood a chance. The developers obviously had few ideas of their own, and it showed.



### Alleykat
As technically good as it was, *Alleykat* was a distinctly average arcade game from Andrew Braybrook, especially when compared to his two previous titles. Blasting your way through an obstacle course and flying as fast as you can didn't make for an enjoyable game.




### Head The Ball
A *Super Mario*-style platformer with ropey graphics for the C64. In Hewson's defence, it only released *Head The Ball* as part of a 1990 compilation called '4th Dimension', which came with half a dozen or so other games. That makes its disappointing quality all right, then.



[C64] Raf Cecco's *Exolon* was converted to the C64 by Nick Jones.

## Journey's end

Hewson's eventual entry into 16-bit gaming started tentatively, with standard conversions of existing 8-bit hits like *Exolon*, *Zynaps* and *Rana Rama*. John M Phillips wrote the shoot-'em-up *Eliminator* specifically for the Atari ST, and after a slow start Hewson did publish some reasonable original 16-bit games including *Onslaught* from Chris Hinsley and Nigel Brownjohn, and *Netherworld* from Imagitec Design.

"I didn't realise why we had no outstanding 16-bit products until many years later" begins Andrew. "In retrospect, I think my books and my *Sinclair User* magazine column were far more influential than I realised. We were approached by some very talented people because my reputation preceded me. Looking back, I should have taken the same approach to the 16-bit market. If I had settled down with an Amiga, worked out what made it tick and then published a book, this would have given me some personal insight into what could or couldn't be done with the machine and we would have attracted another wave of talent."

The slow reaction to the new machines and the lacklustre early conversions put Hewson at a disadvantage, and this ultimately proved to be its downfall. Hewson Consultants finally went under in April 1991. Just two months earlier, its German distributor revealed that it was in financial trouble and couldn't pay the bills. By then, Germany represented 40 per cent of Hewson's revenue, so this news hit the company hard.



"We struggled on for a while, but in April I decided the most responsible thing to do was to call it a day," explains Andrew. "Looking back on it, I think we could have traded through the problems, but I had nobody to turn to and was pretty worn down."

By then, Andrew had realised that the small cottage industry that had started in the early Eighties had fundamentally changed at the turn of the new decade.

"The key problem is that games cost a lot of time, money and effort to develop, and the pay-off is by no means guaranteed. It was obvious to me then, and had been for several years, that the whole industry was going to pass into the control of the financiers. I felt that the time for pioneers like me was rapidly disappearing."

Andrew now looks back on Hewson Consultants with mixed emotions.

"It was a stressful period of my life, which I mostly realised at the time, but it was rather like holding a tiger by the tail – too dangerous to hold on but also too dangerous to let go. I was a bit of a wreck after Hewson went under and I can't have been much fun to be with. I think the bottom line is that it's actually extraordinarily difficult to maintain a creative edge. I was lucky enough to be involved with some fantastic new ideas and products, but after a few years we lost our way. I don't think that's unusual."

Of course, the story doesn't quite end there, because Andrew returned to games publishing with a new company: 21st Century Entertainment. But that's another story…

# THE UNCONVERTED

*Arcade games that never made it home*




» Smacking enemies into walls and other items of scenery is one of *Vendetta*'s more satisfying elements.

## In Depth

» Like many of Konami's arcade games of the Nineties, *Vendetta* was a four-player slugfest.

» The levels teem with interactivity. Smash enemies into walls, break scaffolding, or punch over a shop display.

» *Vendetta* features quite a few weapons, ranging from glass bottles to pump-action shotguns.



# VENDETTA

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year Released:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **Well, as we covered this game's predecessor, *Crime Fighters*, in issue 75, and its second sequel, *Violent Storm*, in our first ever Unconverted feature in issue 73, we figured we'd finish off the trilogy with the middle – and undoubtedly best – in the *Crime Fighters* series: *Vendetta* (aka *Crime Fighters 2*). Rather oddly, all three games took a different approach to their visuals. The first game played and looked a lot like *Double Dragon*, the third looked like an action movie starring students from the Pineapple Dance Studios, while *Vendetta* was simply Capcom's *Final Fight* all the way, and was definitely better for it. *Vendetta* found up to four players assuming the role of members of a good-natured gang dubbed The Cobras, as they set out to rescue Kute Kate, the only female member of the gang, from a group of maniacs calling themselves the Dead End Gang. The game ran from the same arcade hardware as Konami's *X-Men* and *The Simpsons*, and despite being easily as good as both of those, it failed to make an impact in arcades, which is probably why it failed to receive a home conversion.**

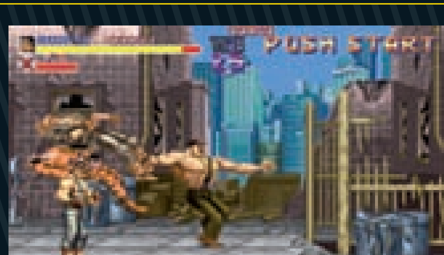
The very best thing about *Vendetta* is the impressive level of presentation and variety that Konami baked into the game, which makes it a real joy to replay again and again. This comes largely from the heroes and the enemies having a decent selection of moves and animations, and the game packing a lot into its five stages, which are broken up into small bitty set-piece style scenarios rather than long, drawn-out, copy-and-paste backdrops. *Vendetta* also boasts a nice selection of weapons, ranging from the seemingly obligatory bottle and knife armaments to things with a bit more kick, such as pump-action shotguns and spiked clubs, which satisfyingly send hapless enemy gang members careering into the shops' faces and brick walls, à la Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Batman Returns*.

The game also closes on a neat boss rush special stage that finds players having to face again all of the bosses, albeit with weakened energy bars, to complete the game fully. Yes, this section is probably just a cheap way to part more money from the player, but it does end things on a bit of a unique note. Like *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder*, *Vendetta* is one of the arcade's most unsung and underappreciated brawlers and is begging to be given the exposure it sorely deserves. If you're reading this, Konami, it's high time you release some kind of *Crime Fighters* trilogy release on XBLA and PSN.

## Converted Alternative

**FINAL FIGHT** 1989

It's clear that, with *Vendetta*, Konami was trying to create something akin to *Final Fight* but with a little more humour. As such, while *Vendetta* probably isn't as brutal or as rousing as *Final Fight*, it's still a pretty close contemporary, and fans of Capcom's brawler will find plenty to like.



# DINO REX

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year Released:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **If *Primal Rage* is a gaming guilty pleasure for you then you should take the time to check out this unconverted fighter from Taito, which predates Atari's offering by two whole years.**

*Dino Rex* is another dino-on-dino fighter and, in some respects, is a better game thanks to its prehistoric pugilists – there are six on offer, ranging from the popular Triceratops and T-rex for the kids to the Allosaurus and Ceratosaurus to draw in the palaeontologists – feeling bigger and more monstrous. You can live out your Godzilla fantasies by smashing giant dinosaurs into background objects, which makes for some epic clashes. Admittedly the combat and collision detection feel about as dense as a T-rex, and for this reason we're not surprised that it never received a home release, but if you're a fan of unusual brawlers we reckon that you'll find charm in *Dino Rex*, and it could easily become the latest guilty pleasure in your gaming life.





» [Arcade] *Dino Rex* may have been exceeded by *Primal Rage*, but there's still fun to be

## Converted Alternative

**PRIMAL RAGE** 1994

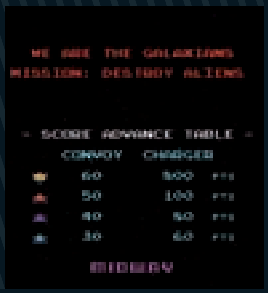
Well this wasn't difficult. Like *Dino Rex*, *Primal Rage* is a 'versus' fighting game starring a cast of ancient lizards and other extinct beasts. Anyway, *Rage* added more characters, better graphics, acute levels of gore, and fatalities to the mix, and found release on a large number of gaming platforms.



## Converted Alternative

**GALAXIAN** 1979

While *Radar Scope* was said to have been inspired by *Space Invaders*, we think it's more similar to *Galaxian*, but with some subtle gameplay tweaks and a skewed perspective. While not as good as Namco's offering, we think Nintendo's early arcade shooter is worth checking out nonetheless.




# RADAR SCOPE

■ **Developer:** Nintendo ■ **Year Released:** 1980 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up







» [Arcade] *Radar Scope* is famous as the precursor to Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*.

■ **Why *Radar Scope* never made it out of the arcades is no real mystery. It was based on an already popular arcade game, failed to strike a chord in the West, and was rapidly wiped off the face of the planet by an ape with a silly name.**

*Radar Scope* is essentially a skewed version of *Galaxian*, with the player assuming the role of a satellite that fires laser beams towards a meandering fleet of enemy ships at the top of the screen. The player can only destroy enemy ships as they make their attack, as only then do they fall within the 'hit zone' on the screen, which can make it feel a little plodding at times, to its detriment. *Radar Scope* doesn't hold a candle to *Donkey Kong*, but the game is certainly worth checking out if you're a fan of old-school vertical shooters of the *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* persuasion.

## Best Left In The Arcade

# MAGICAL CAT ADVENTURE

■ **Developer:** Wintechno ■ **Year Released:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

■ **The familial-sounding title of this arcade platformer should give you a hint as to what our biggest gripe with it is. It does absolutely nothing new, and can be hailed as one of the finest examples of what was wrong with the platform genre in the Nineties: it fast became uninspired and lazy before getting trampled by a crowd of lacklustre platform heroes. *Magical Cat* unabashedly cribs from other games.**

For starters, the game's title sounds like a spin on Vic Tokai's *Magical Flying Turbo Hat Adventure*, the main character looks like Bubsy, the levels are themed on predictable locales such as forests and lava-filled caves, and there's even a *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*-style stage set on a fleet of pirate ships. The offspring of *GNG* and *Bubsy* is probably a good way to explain *Magical Cat*'s gameplay: it's one of those shoot-'em-up/platformer hybrids. *Magical Cat Adventure* is not an awful game, but as it feels so uninspired we're not surprised that it never found a home release.

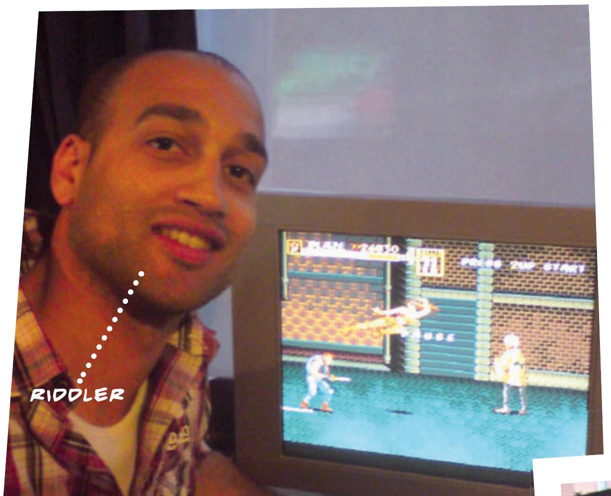


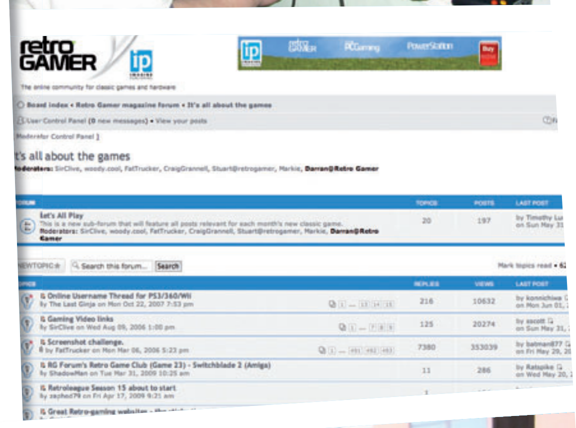
Building on the excellent bender of virtual violence that was the original Streets Of Rage, Sega pulled the rug violently from beneath us when it released a flawless sequel that packed more punch than a Punch and Judy/UFC/Mixed Binge Drinker's convention on the streets of Soho during a full moon


















# LET'S ALL PLAY: STREETS OF RAGE II



## INFORMATION

**Publisher:** Sega
**Developer:** In-house
**First Released:** 1993
**Featured System:** Mega Drive

## First Impressions

**Stuart Hunt** I remember first witnessing the beauty of *Streets Of Rage II* at a mate's house. At the time I had a Super Nintendo with a fair few games, including *Final Fight*, and *Final Fight Guy* on import (because at the time I was clearly some kind of money-burning idiot). I was instantly hooked by the sheer intensity of the game, and instantly fell in love with its strident electro soundtrack. Insanely jealous of my mate, and desperate to own the game for myself, I promptly part-exchanged a large portion of my SNES collection (including both *Final Fights*) and, with the credit I was given, picked myself up a Mega Drive and a copy of *Streets Of Rage II*. Sure, my SNES collection took a bit of dent, but it was definitely worth it.

**Lanky316** I remember thinking 'where's the dude with the rocket launcher?', shortly followed by the realisation Sega had somehow topped the original which I'd loved so much.

**MattyC64c** I was quite simply amazed by *SOR II*, the sound was fantastic and the sprites were huge, especially Max! Now, I loved the first one, but *SOR II* was an absolute cracker, quite possibly better than Capcom's *Final Fight*!

**SeppSalerno** The first thing that hits me whenever I load up *SOR II* isn't the badly named token street-walkers, or the deceptively slick 16-bit graphics but the music in the game. The music in *SOR II* is just incredible, level-by-level, track by track, they're true retro-gaming floor fillers, foot-tappers that make me grin like a simpleton while I'm breaking a gang member's face. You could honestly polish these 16-bit audio beauties up in a proper sound studio now and release them on 12-inch! But in all honesty, that wouldn't be all that necessary, as when you play *SOR II* on a television with some serious speakers, the tunes are as crisp and diamond-cut as they could be considering its age.

**Riddler** Honestly, I never got on with Mega Drive games, but this was certainly one of the elite. Nice big sprites, colourful, great gameplay, I mean this was honestly better than some arcade games. This was, for sure, the Mega Drive's answer to *Final Fight*. The sound in this (by which I really mean the music mainly) was great, not at all boring and repetitive. I mean it really pumped! I can always remember the first level of this, and that's what I think of whenever I hear 'Streets Of Rage'. A great game I think is judged by a decent opening level, and it really got off to a good start with this one. I did find the later levels a bit confusing, as they randomly jumped to different places; first you'll be in a bar then on a ship, then in the scene from *Aliens* with those egg things! I did find this a little strange.

**Megamixer** The first time I played this was waaaaay back in the early Nineties when I was a kid. Growing up, I forgot all about it and was always told by my uncle that it was a *Street Fighter* spin-off. Fast-forward a few years and I got the game myself. It was instantly one of those games that I knew could never get boring and would always be satisfying to play. I kept on expecting the










## ★ GO DEEPER: TRIVIA TRAIL

>> *Streets Of Rage II* is the only game in the series to have one ending; the other games feature two: one bad and one good.

>> The music from the Stadium Stage, round 4, sounds uncannily similar to The Shamen's hit 'Move Any Mountain'.

>> Via emulation, a beta version of *SOR II* can be played. It plays out over a single stage, and features a few differences to the final game.

>> While unconfirmed, it's rumoured that Adam's son Skate was inspired by Skate in Sammy's Mega Drive beat-'em-up *DJ Boy*.

later levels to degrade in terms of quality, but no such thing happened. Not having the manual also proved to be a good thing, as I had to discover the special moves myself through experimentation, and when I did discover one it was awesome.

## Why is it a classic?

**Darran** *Streets Of Rage II* works so well because it takes every single aspect of the original game – which was admittedly nothing more than a *Final Fight* rip-off – and improves upon it massively. More characters to choose from, impressive animation, truly fantastic and memorable music, satisfying new moves; the list of just goes on and on. While Sega once again improved aspects of the core game for its sequel, *Streets Of Rage II* remains the premier scrolling fighter on Sega's 16-bit machine and also one of the best examples of the scrolling beat-'em-up genre period. A true videogame classic in just about every sense.



**thevulture** Easy, it's the perfect sequel: everything good from the first game has been vastly built upon. Massive sprites, lush backdrops and the best ever Mega Drive music are the audio/visual icing on a monster of a gaming cake. It's the pinnacle of the scrolling beat-'em-ups for me. Vast array of moves, very fluid control system, punches that felt like they were doing some real damage, a one-on-one duel mode, and a soundtrack that really urged you on.

**Nakamura** I was a SNES owning mate and it shut me up! Then I pinched his MD and played it to death! The whole game is brilliant, music, graphics, levels and the moves. All of it was better than the first and indeed better than the third. There were no decent two-player scrolling fighters on the SNES I recall, certainly not at the time, and this just oozed class.

**Lanky316** Any game which my dad would badger me to play is a good sign. Think it just had everything: great gameplay, great colour, great sound. There's not a side-scroller that comes close.

**Crusto** It's the massive level of polish that wins the day for me. It's pure class from start to finish. There's never a dull moment, the difficulty curve is spot-on and the music is chartworthy! It was also a kick in the teeth for all the SNES owners at the time who thought the Mega Drive wasn't capable of producing a scrolling fighter to rival *Final Fight*.

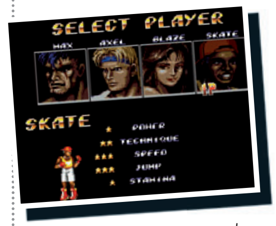


**RalphMilne'sLeftFoot** It summed up everything that was 'gaming' on the Mega Drive at the time. I can remember hordes of kids waiting to get a glimpse of it when an import version showed up at my local gaming shop in Gloucester. They were just stood agog at the graphics and the music being pumped out from a humble Mega Drive. The *Mean Machines* video showing the first stage/fairground as a rolling demo only heightened the anticipation. *SOR II* is the personification of coolness itself. It was the perfect game for the perfect time. It plays well, is finely balanced and has a soundtrack that stands up nearly 20 years later. Unparalleled gameplay; possibly one of the greatest of all time.

**Smurph** Simply put, it ripped off *Final Fight* almost wholesale (incredibly similar sprites, for example), but expanded on all that was good about it into what is, for my money, the best scrolling beat-'em-up ever, and added a whole lot more. The music has never been beaten, it still looks stunning, and it's a blast to play.

## Best moment

**Stuart** There are so many 'best' moments in this game that I'm struggling to whittle it down to just one particular moment. The first boss fight with Barbon the barman in the downpour (so atmospheric) still kicks ass today, but then I absolutely adore the music that kicks off Stage 3, 'Dreamer', and the insanity of the entire stage as it unsubtly segues from a street, to the lamest arcade in the world, to a giant pirate ship, and then rounding off on the set of *Alien*. But then there's that cool fight with Mr X and his martial arts marionette, Shiva, at the game's finale – just so many great elements. Fwarghhhh!



**GigaPepsiMan** The impact of the game's first stage is certainly one highlight, and the fight outside the bar is just fantastic. I also love how the designers included an arcade machine of the first game in the second – that was pretty funny, I must admit. I love using the pipe, as the sound effect it makes is awesome and it makes you think, 'that must have hurt.' The dragon punch combo is great too, especially when you land every hit on a mob of attacking enemies.

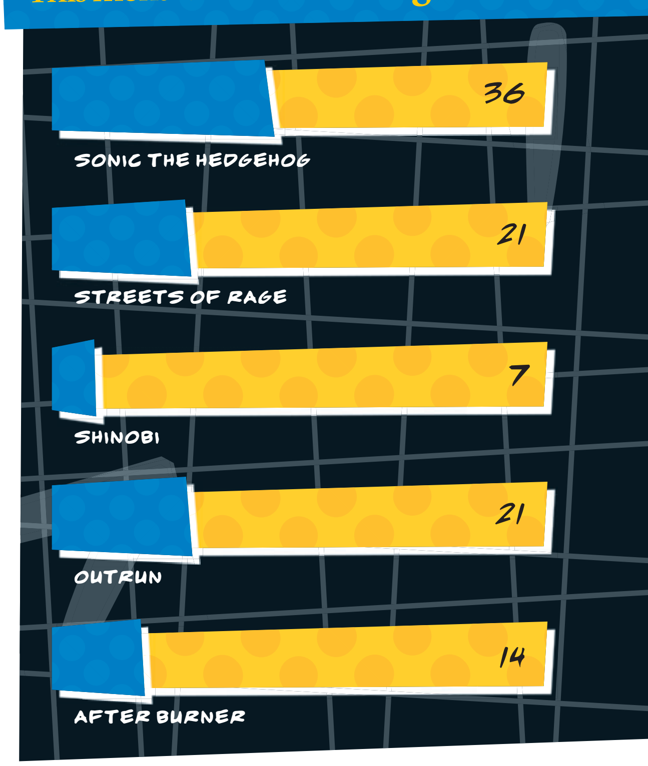
**Roo** Best moment? Unleashing German Suplexes left, right and centre with Max. Especially on your mate if you're fighting over some apples!

**Joey** Every time that first level starts and the music track 'Go Straight' starts thumping.

**Megamixer** There's just so many... The steel pipe and the amazing sound effect as you

## FORUM POLL

### This month: Best Classic Sega Franchise



# LET'S ALL PLAY:
## STREETS OF RAGE II

crack a thug over the head with it is probably my favourite bit - that or accidentally grabbing Blaze's boobs from behind in multiplayer. Seriously though, it's the pipe.

## The series

**Stuart** I actually like all of the games, and yes I am including the third (which I do agree is the weakest in the series, but isn't entirely abysmal). The original game, while certainly dated by today's standards, was bloody impressive in its day, with all the core ingredients that made the sequel special present. It's just lacking its successor's seventeen coats of polish. The third game simply tries too hard to be more epic in feel, but loses its sense of direction as a result and ends up feeling less like a game you'd want to beat time and time again. I will add that *Rage 3* is a lot better than the third *Golden Axe* game, and I don't think you can blame it for killing off the series - just look at the dire *Final Fight* sequels that found release. Sega really needs to reboot this franchise right away.




**thevulture** Small sprites aside, I still have a soft spot for the first game. It was one of THE games that convinced me to buy a Mega Drive. One thing that I'm still confused over though: is it pepper or CS gas you chuck in the face of your foes? Anyway, onto the third game: what happened there? Bigger cartridge = lesser game. Never took to the Zan character (he just felt a little daft), and the music wasn't patch on the second game.

**Nakamura** The original game, despite a 30fps frame rate and small sprites, is excellent. It has great levels, great music and a great finale. The third game stank to hell. I just hated the characters and the sound killed it. It was a total mess.

**MattyC64c** I loved the first title to bits. I finally got hold of a Mega Drive at Christmas in 1992 (I was 14). I had finally made the move from a Commodore 64 to a state-of-the-art 16-bit console, and *Streets Of Rage* was the first game I played on my new machine. It was fantastic, and felt like I owned my own arcade machine. The second game was even better with its huge sprites and special moves, while the third was just okay.

**Smurph** Being a huge Master System fan, it's strange that I've never played those versions of it. However, I think that the first game was terrible – bad animation, slow gameplay and barely any difference between the characters. The third one was an overblown mess, if I'm honest, and the lack of Max is unforgivable. The only thing I miss on *SOR II* is Adam. I thought he'd have been brilliant with an expanded move set, like Blaze and Axel got for the second game.

## Best stage

**Darran** Personally, my favourite stage is the second. The level is set across a bridge, teeming with gang members riding dirt bikes, then into the trailer of a truck for a fight against more bikers, before a final battle against Jet. What an infuriating bugger to defeat he was (though I soon discovered Axel's flying kick makes pretty light work of him). I'll never forget how my jaw dropped when I first saw this stage in action. There was so much going on on-screen that I thought my Mega Drive was going to start smoking and spluttering. I




» [Mega Drive] Whichever character is your favourite, there's no denying that they all had something slightly different to bring to the battle.




## CLASSIC GAME? YOU MUST BE JOKING

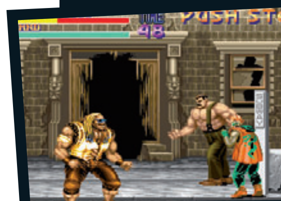
**Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…**

"SORRY, IT'S JUST NOT FOR ME - WAS NEVER TAKEN BY THE SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UP"
TEKAOTAKU

"I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY IT IS HELD IN SUCH HIGH REGARD. SKATE AND MAX ARE RUBBISH CHARACTERS, THE LEVELS ARE BLAND AND THE WHOLE GAME JUST FEELS TOO MUCH LIKE ANOTHER FINAL FIGHT CLONE"
STRANGER81

"I BOUGHT IT AND GOT THE WRONG MANUAL. I TOOK IT BACK AND HAVE HATED THE SERIES EVER SINCE"
LEE MEAD'S PILLOW CASE

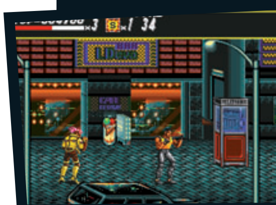
## FURTHER PLAY
### Similar titles you may want to try



### FINAL FIGHT

**FEATURED SYSTEM:** ARCADE
**YEAR RELEASED:** 1989

With their striking similarities, it's clear that Capcom's seminal arcade brawler helped to inspire Sega's. *Final Fight* may have awarded the first round to Capcom, but thanks to *Streets Of Rage II*, and a raft of poor *Final Fight* sequels, Sega went on to win the fight by ironically making *SOR II* more *Final Fight*-y and beating Capcom in its own discipline.



### STREETS OF RAGE

**FEATURED SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
**YEAR RELEASED:** 1991

The first game isn't as good as its sequel – it doesn't even come close – but it did lay down the solid foundation upon which the series would build and improve: a diverse team of heroes, gritty visuals, resplendent audio and, lest we forget, it gave us some of the most enjoyable multiplayer action you could find on the Mega Drive in its fledging years.



### STREETS OF RAGE 3

**FEATURED SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
**YEAR RELEASED:** 1994

An ambitious project that failed to live up to the brilliance of the second game, *Streets Of Rage 3* threw new characters into the pot, some bike sections, dash attacks, a gay stereotype (in the Japanese version) and a boxing kangaroo (in all versions). Full of new ideas, but burdened by a fire-spitting difficulty, and disappointingly rough around the edges.



### GOLDEN AXE III

**FEATURED SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
**YEAR RELEASED:** 1993

Given the popularity of *SOR II*, it's understandable that Sega sought to inject a bit of its magic into its other popular beat-'em-up series, *Golden Axe*. The result was an untidy and unpolished Frankenstein's monster, where the game's visuals, combat and gameplay were all rethought, but ropey visuals and dire collision detection marred the experience.

# MOMENTS IN TIME

## The five defining kick-punch moments that are all in our minds

### 1 STREET OF RAGE

The first level is set on a street, and, as such, feels spookily similar to the start of the first game – in fact, you'd be forgiven for thinking that *SOR II* was going to be one of those weird sequel/reimagining thingies, like *Evil Dead II*. Anyway, after administering a few broken skulls to chaps with weird names, you soon realise this game is something far more special than that.







### 2 BIKER GROVE

The second stage maintains the high-octane pace of the first brilliantly. Things kick off big-time on a bridge, with our heroes dodging a motorcade of motorbike-riding goons armed with lead pipes. A few high-kicks to their helmets will see their limbs splayed all over the tarmac and their bikes seconds away from going boom!

### 3 AMUSEMENT LARK

The third level is clearly set inside some sort of theme park, which would explain all of the weird locales making up this stage. After throwing some Y Signals and Donavans into Bare Knuckle cabs, the quartet set sail on a pirate ship, before entering *Alien War* in the Trocadero to fight Blanka in a Samurai outfit.







### 4 BASEBALL FURY

No scrolling beat-'em-up worth its salt is replete without a lift section. This one is pretty bizarre, and finds our heroes fighting in a baseball stadium until they reach the pitcher's mound. Once there, the ground shakes and lowers until into an underground cage, where the WWF is safely imprisoning the Ultimate Warrior.

### 5 FINAL FIGHT

Ah, the final fight with Mr. X. However, before you can get pounding on the head of the evil gang boss you have to battle and defeat his tasty (in a fighting sense – we're not that brave) bodyguard, Shiva. It's a tough fight, but one that can be won without too much attrition. With Shiva finally defeated, it's finally time to cross out Mr. X for good (see what we did there?).




wouldn't have blamed it either, it's still an astonishing display of the old gal's power.

**lanky316** Stage four, with the first lift set-piece and the baseball ground. Would've loved for some Baseball Furies clones to appear, but that's the only downside for me. Things are made up for me with the Ultimate Warrior cage finish.

**GigaPepsiMan** Stage 1 and 5 are my favourites, but that is mostly down to the music, although the visuals and stage design are great too. The first stage really got you in the mood for the game, with one of the best pieces of music you will ever hear in a beat-'em-up.

**RalphMilne'sLeftFoot** Stage 2 on the bridge, with bikers flying around you, great music, the truck scene, some extra lives thrown in, and then a grossly unfair boss on anything over normal difficulty – what's not to love?

**Joey** I'm also with the first level. The music plays a massive part, but also the detail in the neon background and the seediness of the bar is just fantastic. It sets the tone for the rest of the game perfectly.



## Best character

**Darran** It has to be Skate. Cool as hell and sporting a natty pair of roller skates, he has to be the best character overall. He's as quick as lightning and has the coolest special moves by far. He's a world away from his slow-as-molasses brother Adam (last seen in the first game) and he looks about 12 as well.

**SeppSalerno** Whether you want speed, power, exuberance or grace, you've got four characters that tick all those boxes for your desired beat-'em-up game style. I always go for either Axel or Blaze because they're the easiest to get on with - and I'm a sucker for a foxy brunette in a miniskirt.

**Riddler** BLAZE! She has the best moves, and simply gets out of trickier spots the easiest thanks to her spin kick. Also, her fireball is really effective against bosses. She's certainly the character of my choice.

**RalphMilne'sLeftFoot** Max – best power, best for points, he has coolest looking moves and, if used properly, is nigh-on indestructible. The Atomic Drop owns all in that game, and there is no finer satisfaction than performing an Atomic Drop on a boss. Love it!

**Shinobi** Blaze, as she's the best character of all three (and I prefer using the female characters). It's also easy to one-credit-finish the game with her… I normally used to play two-player with my friend who used to play as Axel. I still play as Blaze even now.

**Smurph** All of them have their strong points – Skate sitting on the enemies' shoulders and punching them repeatedly is good for a laugh; Max has by far the most powerful move in the game with the knee drop; Blaze is well balanced and shows a bit of knicker, and Axel has my favourite move set – with the Grand Upper foremost in the awesome stakes – and is the character I play best with. Blaze it is then!



» [Mega Drive] One of *SOR II*'s best elements was its seedy ghetto atmosphere; what other game lets you brawl in the driving rain?



## NEXT MONTH'S GAME

### RAINBOW ISLANDS

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.

# SAME NAME DIFFERENT GAME

**When going by that front cover simply isn't enough**

**We've all been there. You're over a friend's house and watching as he shows off his latest game.** Silently impressed – even if you'll never admit it because he has a computer/console that you don't own – you start saving the cash for when it's your turn to host a games night. After much car-washing, sweeping of floors and saving you've finally earned enough cash to buy your own copy and… it's completely bloody different. And we don't just mean it's different because his SNES graphically packs a little more punch than your Mega Drive. We mean different as in: 'Hang on. The SNES version is a scrolling fighter and this is a platformer. I wanted to hit things.'

Of course, sometimes it would work in your favour and you'd end up with a title that far surpassed the one you originally fell in love with, while other purchases would see you ending up with a real stinker. So with that in mind, join Darran Jones, as he dissects a number of well-known and more obscure titles that share the same name and box cover but are made up of completely different videogame DNA.

## Case 1: Ghostbusters

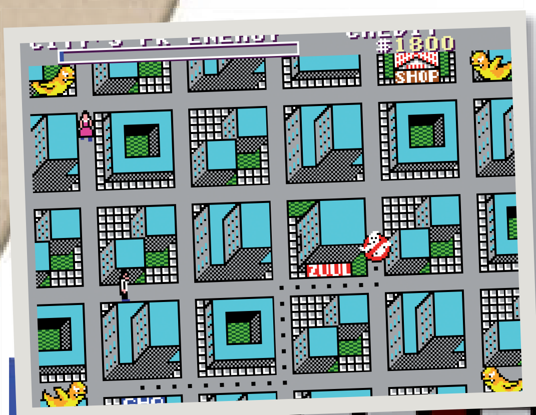
■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI 2600, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, MSX, NES, PC, SPECTRUM ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1984 - 1990

### Exhibit 1: David Crane's game

David Crane's *Ghostbusters* was a phenomenal success upon its release and rightly so. Featuring a fun little representation of the theme tune that you could sing along to at its beginning and that immediately captured the atmosphere of the movie it was based on, it cleverly mixed elements of resource management and good old-fashioned twitch skills to create a highly successful game, which even now manages to impress. Divided into four distinct parts, you first get the chance to equip your ghostbusting vehicle with handy paranormal gear. After that, it's time to hit the streets of Manhattan, a 5x6 grid of buildings that will routinely flash when ghosts are present. A quick trip in Ecto-1 – where you can suck up oncoming ghosts, should you have the right equipment – and it's time to participate in some actual trapping. Or bustin', if you will.

It's this constant variation in *Ghostbusters*' gameplay that ensures that it never stays stale for too long and also means that even after all this time, it remains a great example of how to get the best out of a videogame licence. Before we move on, it's worth noting that both the NES and Master System versions offer a few variations over the original game that Crane created.

Once you sneak past the Marshmallow Man, you enter a side-on platforming section before your final showdown with Zuul. The game itself is also far more challenging than the home computer versions due to you often having to trap multiple ghosts at once. Even with these additions, both the NES and Master System updates are simply that. The Mega Drive offering, on the other hand, is something quite different.



[Master System] The Master System version is extremely similar to Crane's original game but features more ghosts to trap and a new level.



[Amstrad] David Crane's *Ghostbusters* remains a superb title, effortlessly blending genres to great effect.

### Exhibit 2: Mega Drive

Released a good six years after Crane's original *Ghostbusters* game, the Mega Drive version couldn't be more different. Published by Sega and developed by Compile, which also took care of the excellent Master System offering, the Mega Drive outing takes the form of a side-on platformer. You have a choice of playing as the three main 'Busters, and each has his own strengths and weaknesses: Peter Venkman is the all-rounder, Ray Stantz boasts high armour but low speed, and Egon Spengler is quick on his feet but easily prone to damage.

After accepting a mission, multiple choices come up after the first boss is defeated. You're thrown into a large free-roaming area where you need the reflexes of a Jedi to defeat the ridiculous number of enemies and seemingly random attack patterns that are constantly thrown at you. It's extremely humorous in places and features some well-designed mayors, but *Ghostbusters* on the Mega Drive is simply far too tough for its own good.










**The Verdict:** **While many will lean towards the Mega Drive outing due to its impressive visuals and copious amounts of humour, the original template created by David Crane is just a far better-rounded experience. Our tip? Hunt down Compile's wonderful Master System port. You won't be disappointed.**

## Case 2: Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

**■ FEATURED SYSTEMS:** GAME GEAR, MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM **■ YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 – 1991

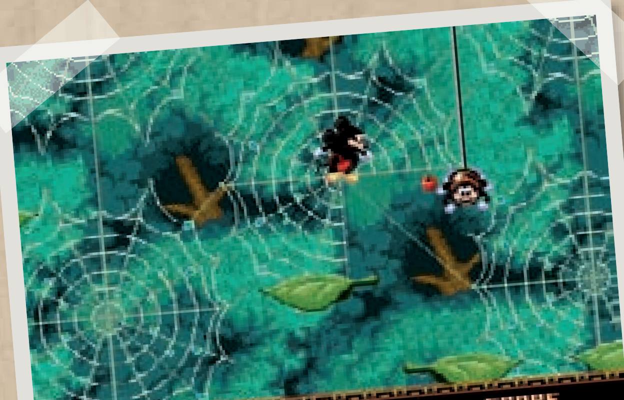
### Exhibit 1: Mega Drive

When Sega picked up the licence to the world's most famous mouse, it ended up creating two distinct games. The Mega Drive outing is perhaps the most well-known due to the popularity of Sega's 16-bit console, and it's also an amazingly entertaining romp that has Mickey traversing ice cream worlds, foreboding forests, spider-infested clearings and other scenes that appear to have been plucked straight out of a story book.

It's also an aesthetic delight thanks to some truly mesmerising visuals, excellent sprite design and delightful audio that, again, effortlessly captures the feel of the cartoons that Mickey usually stars in. If we were to have one minor gripe about *Castle Of Illusion*, it's that the general layout and simple boss attacks make the game a little too easy. On the other hand, it at least makes it easy to complete.







### Exhibit 2: Master System, Game Gear

On first look, the 8-bit conversions of *Castle Of Illusion* appear to be nothing more than a scaled-down version of the Mega Drive game. Start playing, however, and you'll soon discover them to be completely different, even if they do share many of the same themed worlds.

Level design is completely different to that of the 16-bit title, and also a lot trickier to negotiate due to Sega including plenty of tougher adversaries. There's far more focus on collecting items, while Mickey is able to pick up and throw certain objects, a key mechanic that's missing entirely from the Mega Drive game. A couple of other nice touches are how you can choose what level you wish to start on and the large number of hidden items that can be found, meaning the 8-bit titles reward exploration. Our only real niggle is some awkward control layouts that make bottom-bouncing a pain in the arse.

**The Verdict:** **We were tempted to go for the 8-bit efforts due to the improved play mechanics and far more challenging gameplay, but fiddly controls mean that the Mega Drive edition is the definitive version to buy.**



# Case 3: Shadow Dancer

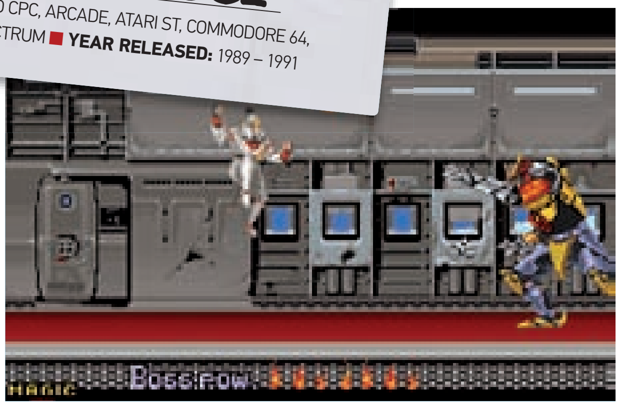
■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** AMSTRAD CPC, ARCADE, ATARI ST, COMMODORE 64, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE, SPECTRUM ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1989 – 1991



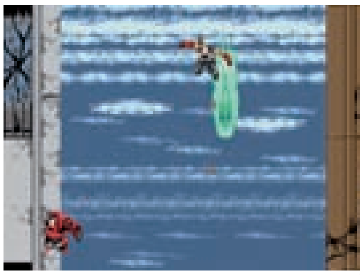
[Arcade] *Shadow Dancer*'s bonus section impresses graphically but lacks the frantic action of the one in *Shinobi*.

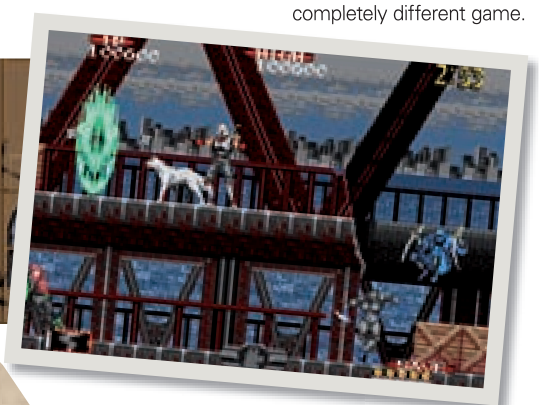
## Exhibit 1: Arcade

*Shadow Dancer* was Sega's follow-up to its successful *Shinobi*, with one important difference: you were accompanied by a faithful hound. It's an attack dog, no less, as you can send him out to worry an opponent, allowing you to despatch the foe while he is still busying himself with your pet mutt. It's a solid little mechanic that adds nicely to the core *Shinobi* gameplay. Sadly, *Shadow Dancer* is let down by surprisingly stodgy controls, uninspiring level design, and a really frustrating difficulty level. Numerous ports appeared on 8 and 16-bit home computers, as well as Sega's own Master System, but they were just as poor as the arcade original. If only another version of *Shadow Dancer* existed…



[Mega Drive] The 16-bit version, on the other hand, is far better, easily matching the frenetic pace of the original.



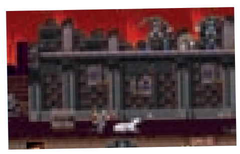


## Exhibit 2: Mega Drive

Oh wait, it does, and it's awesome to boot. Sega used to make quite a few changes when it ported arcade games to the Mega Drive, and *Shadow Dancer* was no different. While the core mechanics are nigh-on identical, the structure is completely different due to brand new levels, far better bosses, and a greatly improved difficulty level. There's a new bonus stage as well, which is far more enjoyable. In the original arcade game you mow down ninja as they jump down towards you, which admittedly looks rather funky, but here you leap off a building and take them down, shmup-style, as they approach from below. Add in far more responsive controls and this magnificent console offering feels like a completely different game.

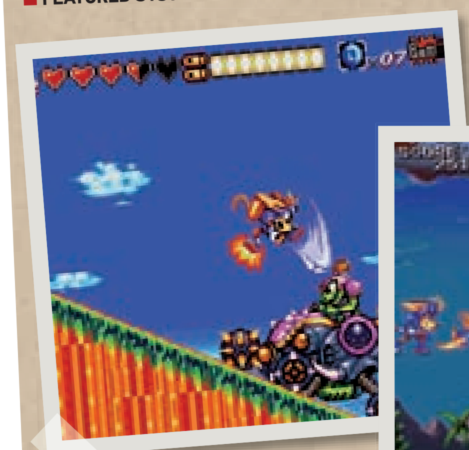
### The Verdict:

**You may have already guessed, but we prefer the Mega Drive variation. It features a far better challenge, has plenty of new stages, and boasts excellent, tight controls.**



# Case 4: Sparkster

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** MEGA DRIVE, SNES ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1994



[Mega Drive] *Sparkster* on the Mega Drive looks extremely impressive, but it can't hold a candle to the stunning SNES offering.



## Exhibit 1: Mega Drive

Wikipedia states that *Sparkster* on the Super NES was always meant to be a standalone title to the Mega Drive games. Without Konami on hand to verify this and because both games sport identical artwork, we're including them anyway.

Subtitled as *Rocket Knight Adventure 2* on the title screen, the Mega Drive *Sparkster* is actually a really great game and typical of Konami's slick 16-bit output. Gameplay is nice and speedy, Sparkster himself has access to a whole variety of excellent moves, including his wonderful jetpack burst, and everything nips along at a cracking pace.

## Exhibit 2: SNES

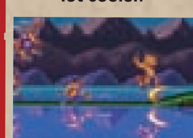
Konami's games always turned up better on the SNES, and *Sparkster* was no exception. Featuring absolutely mind-blowing visuals, it's an aesthetic beauty that makes the gorgeous-looking Mega Drive offering look like that long-distance aunt you rarely meet whose moustache tickles you whenever you have to kiss her. Gameplay mechanics are also significantly different, as Sparkster can use his prehensile tail to cling on to branches and pipes to reach higher areas. He also has a powered-up sword that shoots flames, giving him slightly better range, a new dash attack, and far larger levels in which to make use of his jetpack.

[SNES] Larger levels on the SNES allow Sparkster more use of his rocket pack.



### The Verdict:

**Easily the SNES version. The controls are tighter, level design is far more interesting, and Sparkster himself just looks a hell of a lot cooler.**



# Case 5: Sonic Blast Man

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** ARCADE, SNES ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 - 1992



## Exhibit 1: Arcade

*Sonic Blast Man* was a regular sight in arcades during the early Nineties. Unmissable thanks to its huge pad and bulky cab design, it was effectively nothing more than a 'test your strength' machine. The difference here, however, is rather than hit something with a hammer, you're required to punch the pad as hard as you can to take down whatever obstacle is on screen. Initially you just have to punch out a hoodlum, but later tasks require you to stop a speeding truck and even save Earth from an approaching meteor. It's all silly fun and heightened by its gaudy visuals and over-the-top effects, but surely it could never be converted to a home system, could it?





## Exhibit 2: SNES

Of course it could. You simply turn it into an average scrolling fighter and hope that no one notices what you've done. To be fair on Taito, it was probably the best thing it could do at the time, and while it's full of simplistic moves that normally consist of *Sonic Blast Man* despatching his opponents in an amusing fashion, it still manages to be hilarious fun, although the lack of a second player really hurts in the longevity department.

Not wanting to dismiss the original game completely, Taito reintroduced the arcade game in *Sonic Blast Man*'s bonus stages. Due to the SNES not being linked to a gigantic pad, players were instead required to rapidly rotate the D-pad in order to build power. Harmless, silly fun.



### The Verdict:

**While the arcade game is a fun experience, the silly, over-the-top moves of the SNES outing just about edges it for us. Not the best scrolling fighter, but still fun.**

# Case 6: Action Biker

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** ATARI 8-BIT, C64, SPECTRUM ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1983 – 1985




## Exhibit 1: Atari 8-bit, C64

If you can look past the fact that this isometric adventure is tied to both KP Skips and its Eighties' mascot Clumsy Colin, you'll discover that it's hiding an enjoyable, if far from earth-shattering game. Set in an impressive isometric town and featuring some funky music by the legendary Rob Hubbard, you take on the role of Colin and must traverse the landscape, looking for items to power up your cycle. It's incredibly simple stuff – the most challenging part of the game is making sure that you don't run out of fuel – but it nevertheless has a certain amount of charm.



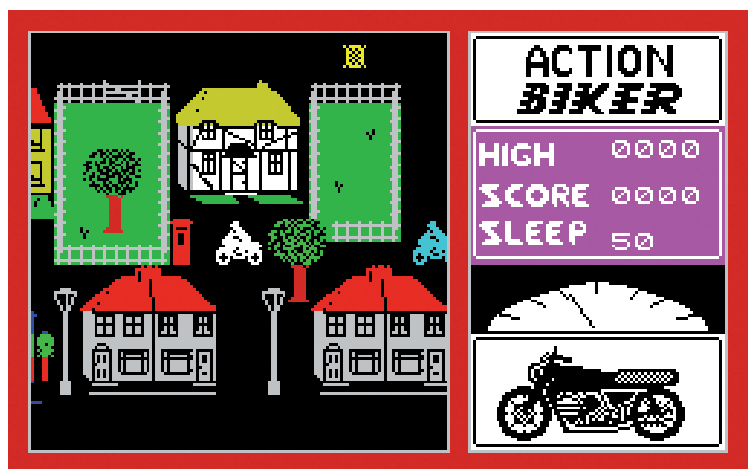
### The Verdict:

**The C64 version by a proverbial mile. Yes, there's not a lot to it, but at least it's playable and fairly enjoyable.**




## Exhibit 2: Spectrum

Oh dear. Something has desperately gone wrong here. While the C64 offering is hardly a masterwork in game design, this Spectrum outing is simply terrible. There's a barmy plot involving Colin looking for his friend, the town layout isn't isometric like the C64 game, and it's completely different and poorly designed. Although it features some new gameplay mechanics including the ability to enter houses to search for items and a sleep meter that depletes whenever you hit another vehicle, it's all executed so poorly that you'll never want to eat a bag of Skips again.



# Case 7: Jurassic Park

■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** ARCADE, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA-CD, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SNES ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1993

Four different developers worked on *Jurassic Park* games for a variety of different systems. Ocean took care of the home computer and Nintendo versions, while BlueSky Software handled the vast majority of Sega ports. Finally, Sega of America started working on a title for its Mega-CD system, while Sega of Japan toiled away on an arcade offering. On top of that, both Ocean and BlueSky Software made significant changes to most of the different versions that they worked on. Needless to say, finding the best version of *Jurassic Park* is a headache of dinosaur-sized proportions. We'll certainly give it a try, though.

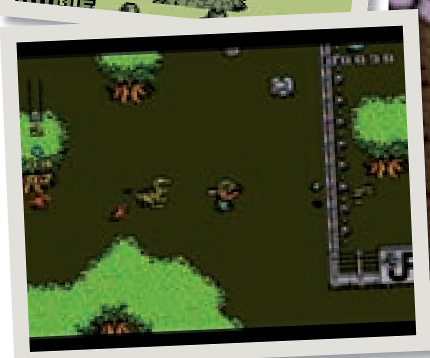



[NES] Although it's similar to the SNES game, it remains totally different to play.

## Exhibit 1: NES, Game Boy

We kick off our dinosaur romp with a look at Ocean's 8-bit adventures, and both are pretty good. Although they utilise the same skewed-above look that appears in all of Ocean's *Jurassic Park* titles, there's enough variation in them to ensure that they feel like significantly different adventures. Unlike the other Ocean versions, the Nintendo titles have more in common – plot-wise, at least – with the original novel, and they are far slower-paced games. The NES offering features stampedes that you have to avoid and the ability to go boating, ensuring that there's plenty of variety on offer. The Game Boy outing follows the NES game as closely as possible, although memory constraints meant that not all the NES's levels are included.





## Exhibit 3: SNES

Once upon a time we mistakenly thought that the Super Nintendo version was identical to the Amiga and PC games. Now we know that's far from true. It utilises a similar 'sort of overhead but not quite' viewpoint that the other 16-bit offerings possess, but the level layout is completely different. There's less variety in the available dinosaurs that you encounter, while a larger focus is placed on exploring the huge 3D areas. Puzzles are also extremely basic, often requiring you to do little more than hit a crank in order to raise or move something.

Despite its shortcomings when compared to its bigger brothers, *Jurassic Park* on the SNES is still a cracking title and offers a great level of difficulty balance that is missing from the Amiga and PC offering. If your only machine was Nintendo's 16-bit console, you certainly wouldn't have been disappointed with it.



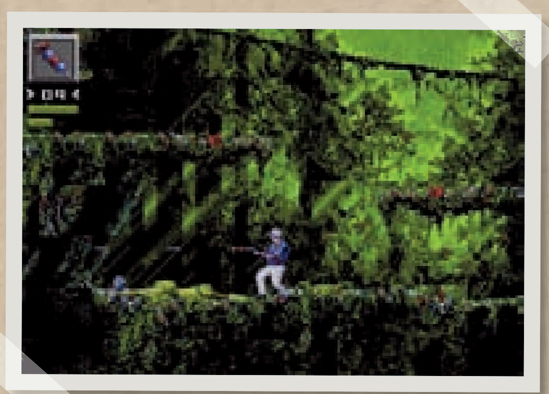





## Exhibit 2: Mega Drive

Wanting to try something a little different for its 16-bit platformer, BlueSky Software gave players a choice: to either play as Alan Grant or a Velociraptor. It's an extremely neat concept as it not only makes its effort stand apart from all the other versions, but also changes the dynamics of the actual gameplay.

Each character has a completely different layout and story, with Grant finding his way back to the visitor's centre and the Raptor escaping its pen. Both characters also cross each other's paths at several points in the game – Grant is actually the final boss for the Raptor's game – while they play quite differently to each other. Grant's sections are all about exploring, while the Raptor favours all-out fighting over platforming antics. Clunky controls can occasionally ruin things, but this is definitely worth tracking down if you're looking for something a little different.



## Exhibit 4: Amiga, PC

Starting off next to your crashed jeep, the PC and Amiga versions of *Jurassic Park* soon prove that they have very little in common with Ocean's fun SNES game. The most notable change is that more has been made of the 3D sections and they're now geared toward quick, frenetic encounters. Then there's the generally dowdy tone of everything that gives both titles a far more atmospheric feel. Finally, unlike the SNES game, there are a variety of different puzzles that range from simply moving around objects to reach new areas, to guiding stranded children to safety. A solid adventure and arguably one of Ocean's greatest uses of a film licence.




## Exhibit 5: Arcade

Knowing that it's all-out thrills that convince gamers to part with their hard-earned cash in the arcades, Sega pulled out all the stops to ensure that its coin-op game was just as exciting as Spielberg's hit film.

Don't expect *Jurassic Park* to follow the plot of the film, but you can look forward to some ridiculously frantic lightgun action that has you shooting down waves of Pteranodon and Raptors, while avoiding stampeding Triceratops and two hungry T-rexes. Full of set pieces – one highlight takes place on a *Power Drift*-inspired track that has you pummelled by Pterodactyls – *Jurassic Park*'s simple gameplay is let off by the fact that it's so exciting to play. Housed in a huge cab when it was first released, it perfectly matches the thrills and spills of the original film, even if it doesn't feature the same plot.



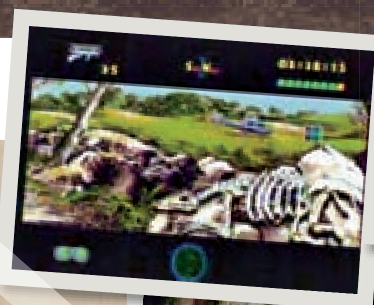
If you enjoyed this feature and want to see more examples be sure to visit Darran's YouTube channel at **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz** and type in Same Name

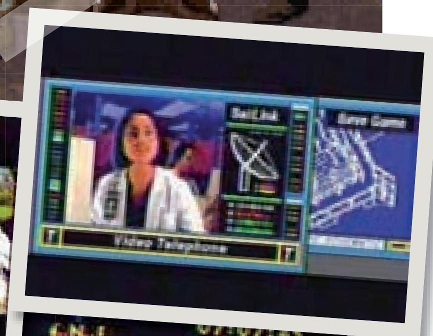
## Exhibit 6: Mega-CD

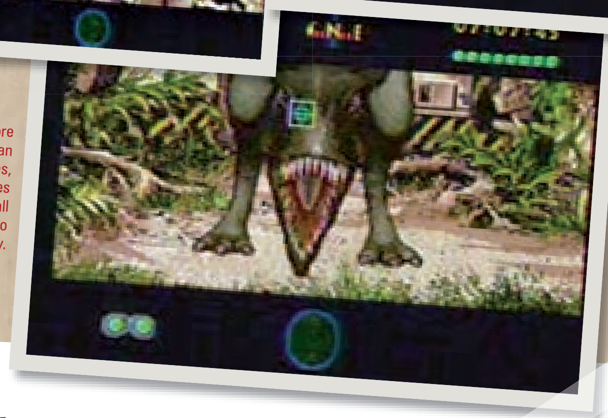
Sega's CD-based offering is genuinely considered by those lucky enough to have played it to be the best use of the *Jurassic Park* licence and it's easy to see why. Taking the form of a point-and-click adventure and giving you 12 real-world hours to complete it, this version works so well because it creates a dramatic sense of atmosphere, even if it does bear little relation to the actual film.

Skilfully blending 2D sprites with CG videos and plenty of decent live-action sections – you're given updates whenever you visit the control room or dinosaur kiosks that are littered around the island – Sega of America's game constantly surprised you with its jaw-dropping set pieces, creative puzzles and stunning aesthetics.

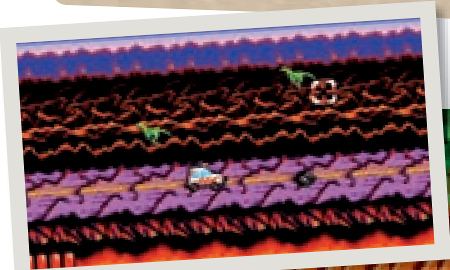
Yes, there are rather lengthy load times and yes, the gameplay itself – your mission is to recover seven dinosaur eggs – is fairly minimal, but it matters not. *Jurassic Park* on the Sega CD – it was never released in the UK – is not only an excellent game in its own right, but a great example of creating a licensed game by playing to the host machine's strength.





[Mega-CD] It's more slow-paced than the other games, but that just makes the set pieces all the more exciting to actually play.





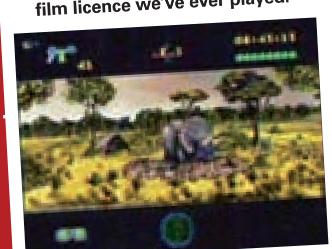
## Exhibit 7: Game Gear, Master System

Oh dear. If BlueSky managed to turn its Mega Drive interpretation of *Jurassic Park* into an enjoyable platformer, it failed miserably with its 8-bit efforts. Both the Master System and Game Gear iterations are virtually identical and consist of two distinct sections: shooting and platforming.

After choosing a level you set off in your jeep using the on-screen cursor to shoot down attacking reptiles. Horribly unresponsive thanks to iffy controls and a jerky frame rate, things fare little better once you've beaten each stage's boss. Taking on the role of Grant, you stumble through some of the worst levels since *Cyber Shinobi*. Death comes quickly and often, the controls are abysmal, and the difficulty is ridiculous. The visuals are top notch, but this is a huge disappointment.

### The Verdict:

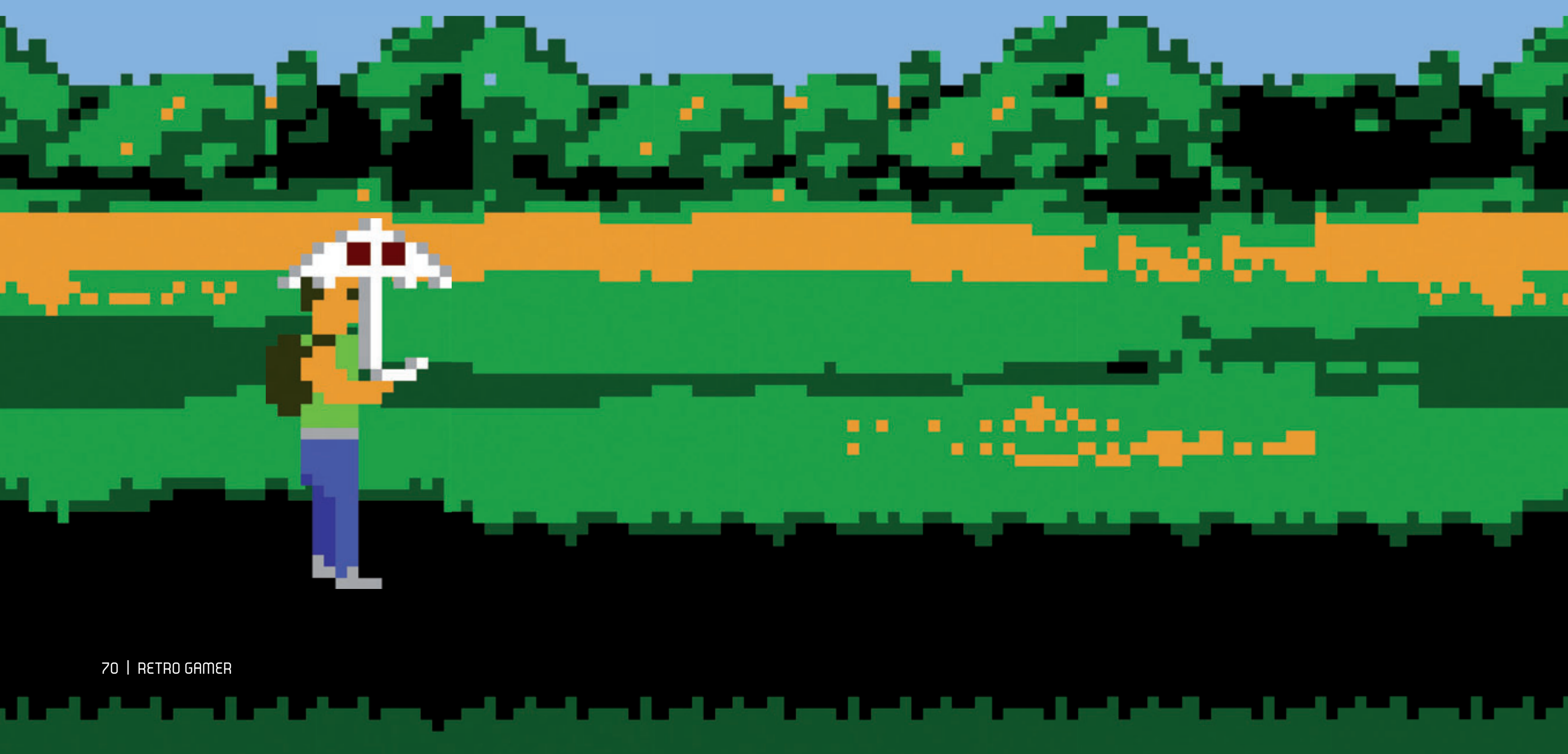
**This was perhaps the hardest category to judge, because all the games have their own merits. We're going to go with the excellent Mega-CD version, due to the fact that it contains an immersive experience that's unmatched by virtually any other film licence we've ever played.**



# A Boy And His Blob

## Trouble On Blobolonia

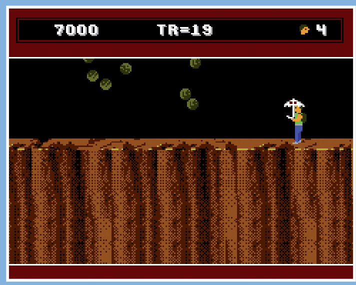
After giving us one of the earliest examples of a realistic-looking human character in a videogame, David Crane blessed one of his virtual Adams with an unusual Eve: a jellybean-chomping alien named Blobert. Crane spills the jellybeans about his NES classic, A Boy And His Blob: Trouble On Blobolonia, to Stuart Hunt



**Forging a relationship inside a game has the power to inspire emotion like nothing else. Rarely is a strong bond between the gamer and their avatar struck up over the course of an adventure. How can it? The instant our virtual hero dies our natural reaction is to lambast their idiocy for making us replay something over again, and the second that they do achieve something amazing it's ourselves that we're mentally giving a pat on the back to.**

Throw another character into the mix, though – a character that is looking to you for direction and guidance – and things can change dramatically. Who can forget frantically trying to prevent their stranded party from being carried away by pterodactyls in Denton Designs' 8-bit classic *Where Time Stood Still*, or the pang of heroism felt by grabbing the hand of an ethereal girl and pulling her from vaporous ink clouds in *Ico*? Relationships are some of the most indelible and magical things that can occur in games, staying with you long after the credits, and are the very things that have helped games such as *Ico*, *Shenmue*, *Sonic 2* and *Where Time Stood Still* feel so memorable.

So where can we trace the introduction of that unusual 'in-game relationship'? Well, we've already mentioned the emotional impact of *WTSS*, but for many console owners their first taster of this unusual bond between gamer and game came from a humorous cartoon adventure game by David Crane titled *A Boy And His Blob*. Released exclusively for the NES, the game saw a young boy befriend an intergalactic white ball of glob that had a peculiar reaction to sugary jellybeans. Feeding Blob a jellybean would cause him to transform into an object that Boy could use to solve puzzles, protect himself from threats, and help the duo traverse the game's perilous world. Alone, Boy and Blob were pretty useless, but together they were an unstoppable force that embarked on one of the quirkiest and most fondly remembered NES adventures as they worked together to save Blob's home planet of Blobolonia from the evil Emperor.

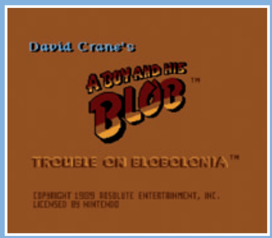









> **"Alone, Boy and Blob were useless. Together they were unstoppable"**




## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ABSOLUTE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** IMAGINEERING
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

At the time, Crane saw the relationship aspect of *A Boy And His Blob* as a way to put his own stamp on the advances that had occurred in the genre since the release of his last adventure, *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*, in 1983. Working alongside his friend and collaborator Garry Kitchen, and publishing the game under their new studio Absolute Entertainment, Crane saw an opportunity to do something truly unique in the genre.

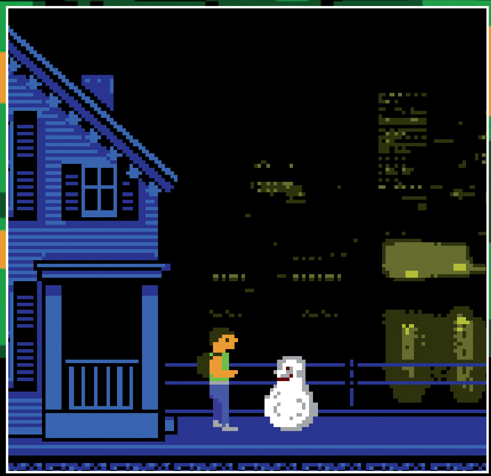
"As you might guess from *Pitfall*, I like adventure games with puzzles and tasks along the way," he explains. "By the time I was thinking about a new adventure game, the genre had expanded to include tool use. The on-screen avatar might collect objects from one area and use them in another, but having and displaying a tool inventory was not very elegant, so I started looking for a different way to do the same thing. I remembered a cartoon series from my childhood called *The Herculoids* that featured a couple of shape-changing blobs that often saved the day by transforming into useful objects. That was the spark to create a buddy who could become all of the tools you needed to complete the adventure."

Typing '*Herculoids*' into Google flashes up a quirky-looking






» [Wii] Crane has yet to play the excellent *Boy And His Blob* reboot by WayForward Technologies, but did say that the visuals look "beautiful".



# A BOY AND HIS BLOB: TROUBLE ON BLOBOLONIA



Hanna-Barbera cartoon series that aired in the US in the late Sixties. Starring an odd band of alien superheroes, of this group two characters, Glob and Gleep, immediately catch our eye. Both are white protoplasmic aliens who look uncannily similar to Blob, and further investigation reveals that they have the ability to transform into useful objects too. So with Blobert's origin established, where did the idea to give the white protoplasmic hero a friend stem?

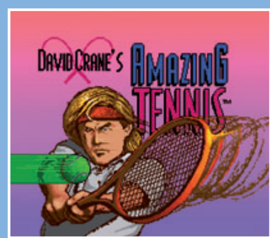
"It is probably apparent that I have always liked puns. A game where you can fall into pits? Let's call it *Pitfall*. If the game is going to have a blob following you around like a dog, then obviously the dog – I mean blob – has to have a boy," says Crane. "As the concept solidified, it was clear that this was going to be a unique part of the gameplay. Your partner was your toolbox, and you needed him as much as he needed you. So you would have to play the game in such a way to bring him along with you."

With the 'buddy toolbox' concept decided, David began planning the layout of the game and deciding on what useful objects Blobert should be able to transform into.

> "A Boy And His Blob was one of the most played games at Nintendo"




» For the game's Japanese release, which was distributed by Jaleco, the Boy sprite was redrawn to make him more anime in look.




## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**DAVID CRANE'S AMAZING TENNIS** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** SNES
**YEAR:** 1992

**THE SIMPSONS: BART VS THE SPACE MUTANTS**
**SYSTEM:** ATARI ST
**YEAR:** 1991

**SUPER BATTLETANK**
**SYSTEM:** GAME BOY
**YEAR:** 1994

"The Blob's transformations came first, from a wish list. Then, once I knew what could be displayed, I designed puzzles that could be solved with those tools. On 8-bit systems like the NES, the display resolution was limited," recalls Crane. "With every game we did, it was necessary to carefully select in-game objects based on how they looked on the screen. We brainstormed a large list of objects that would be useful as tools, and the artists drew them in pixels and put them on screen. A ladder was a must, as was a bridge, but many of the other transformations had to be carefully selected. Many objects were rejected because a player wouldn't immediately know what it was when they saw it in the game. That kind of choice was made every day during 8-bit videogame development. We tried to never intrude on the flow of the game by inserting something that required explanation."

A total of 14 different flavoured jellybeans appeared in the game, each transforming Blob into a unique object with its own specific use. To help the user remember what each of those objects were, Crane decided to relate them – sometimes quite tenuously – to a flavour of jellybean. For instance, feeding Blob a vanilla bean would transform him into an umbrella to protect Boy from falling debris and allow him to float safely to the ground from high platforms, while consuming a tangerine flavour would change him into a handy trampoline, allowing Boy to access otherwise inaccessible platforms. Some diligent fans may recall that the game's manual also included mention of a grape jellybean, a flavour that doesn't actually appear in the final game.

"The grape jellybean was in the game as it was submitted to Nintendo for release," recalls Crane, when revealing to us the story behind the bean's curious disappearance. "The pun was 'Grape Wall', as in China. I believe that the wall was intended to deflect one of the centipede baddies, although I don't remember if that ever got implemented. We found out later that *A Boy And His Blob* was one of the most played games at Nintendo, working its way up to the top management. In the game as I designed it, you had to take good care of your Blob or you could lose the game. If you weren't careful you could become separated from him and not be able to proceed. Apparently this happened once to a member of Nintendo's senior management, and even though it was how the game was intended, this influential person decided that it was a bug. 'We need a way to continue even if we lost our Blob,' and 'We need this fixed by tomorrow or the game won't make Christmas'. The fastest thing I could do was change the name of the

## A BOY AND HIS BLOB: THE ANIMATED MOVIE

One rumour that has always surrounded *A Boy And His Blob* was that Crane intended for the game to spill into merchandise and movie territory, with *A Boy And His Blob* toys, an animated movie, lunchboxes and socks – well, perhaps not the lunchboxes and socks. If true, whatever happened to all the merchandising that was planned?

"In my vision, *A Boy And His Blob* was going to be the first videogame to be simultaneously released as a game, toy and animated feature film," Crane reveals. "We went so far as to bring in the producer of the first animated *Transformers* movie to work on the film development, but that was another casualty of the tight schedule. It would have been difficult to concentrate enough resources simultaneously on those three diverse development tasks."
















grape jellybean to ketchup, and make it teleport the Blob to where it hit the ground – allowing him to 'catch up'. The game could do without the 'wall' tool, so it was no great loss."

Despite the cheery tone of the game, the development cycle of *A Boy And His Blob* proved to be a very testing period for Crane, Kitchen and their team. The game was turned around in just six weeks – a normal NES game development cycle can take roughly six to eight months – and tied up almost every employee at the company to finish. To ensure that the game would meet its impending deadline, Crane even moved from his home in California to New Jersey, renting a 'flop house' close to the office, for the entirety of the extremely tight production schedule.

"Garry and I were sharing the programming – I was on Earth and he was on Blobolonia," he muses. "We worked 16-hour days, seven days per week from the beginning. I would drag myself to the rental at midnight and drag myself back the next morning. With two weeks to go, we weren't going to make it, so I went to a 20-hour day. I would slip off at 2am for four hours of sleep and get back to it by 6am. With two days to go, we still weren't going to make it, so I went without sleep for 48 hours.

"In those days, the Christmas deadline pretty much coincided with the Chicago CES, so after 48 hours of no sleep we flew off to Chicago to demonstrate the product and take orders for the game. We took along a computer, just in case. While demonstrating the game during the day we would find bugs, so after the show hours we went back to a hotel room and fixed them. We only had one computer so one person would doze while the other typed. At some point I would hear 'Dave, wake up. This one's yours,' and Garry and I would change places. This went on for three days."

The blood, sweat and sleep donated by everyone to get the game completed in time for that CES/Christmas deadline, though, was compensated. On its release, *A Boy And His Blob* proved to be a phenomenal success for Absolute Entertainment, going on to become one of the company's biggest hits and exceeding all of the team's expectations. The game went on to receive the prestigious Parent's Choice Award, awarded by the Parent's Choice Foundation to honour and acknowledge the very best products for children.

"I am proud of my Parent's Choice awards," smiles Crane. "I appreciated them before I was a parent, and even more after. A videogame should offer an enjoyable, fantasy release from the stresses of real life. You won't see my name on a game that advocates prostitution or drive-by shootings. Enough said."

Given the arduous production cycle of *A Boy And His Blob*, but the positive reception and sales it found, how does Crane look back on the game after all of these years?

"I have never been involved with a tougher project or a tougher schedule than *A Boy And His Blob*. And yet strangely, that is one of my fondest memories from my 33-year career in videogames."

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

David and Garry are still working together today. Currently, the pair has turned attentions to mobile gaming with the formation of a brand new publishing company named AppStar Games – a studio specialising in producing games for smartphones and other portable gaming systems. Among some of AppStar's most recent projects is the iPad game *Iron Horse*, an addictively simple game that finds users trying to increase the size of a train through quick reactions and keen accuracy, and Crane's *Technical Wizardry* series, in which David shares how he managed to eke so much from the humble Atari 2600 through easy to follow tutorials and interactive illustrations. For more information on AppStar and its games, visit its website: **www.appstargames.com**










» [NES] The game plays out on Earth and Blob's home planet of Blobolonia. The player could flit between the two by transforming Blob into a rocket.




## IN THE KNOW

- **» Name:** Super Hang-On
- **» Released:** 1987
- **» Publisher:** Sega
- **» Developer:** Sega-AM2
- **» Price:** £200-300
- **» By The Same Developer:** Space Harrier, OutRun



# COIN-OP CAPERS

## #6 Super Hang-On

**We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance through those who know it best**



**Remember the first time you saw the 'ride-on' version of Sega's *Hang-On* in the arcade? Your initial impression almost certainly depended on your age. If you were still schooling then the big red bike was immediately the best thing ever – even if you didn't possess the required bulk to actually lean the machine properly from side to side. If you were older, it's likely that you greeted this flashy new arrival with some scepticism. The machine was certainly a show-stopper, but surely the game itself – displayed on an integrated monitor positioned behind the handlebars – couldn't match the brilliance of the bike-based design.**

Thanks to the revered Yu Suzuki and his fledgling AM2 development studio, *Hang-On* successfully married style with substance. Running on Sega's powerful new sprite-scaling hardware, which encompassed twin 68000 processors and a dedicated video board, the result was a silky-smooth, lightning-fast racing game that was an absolute thrill to play. Debuting in 1985, the aptly named *Hang-On* blazed a trail through the arcade and AM2 quickly built on its success with a string of mega hits, including *Space Harrier*, *OutRun* and *After Burner*.

In 1987, Suzuki returned to his original racer with a view to producing a finely tuned update rather than a fully fledged sequel. *Super Hang-On* chiefly addressed the main issue with the original: with just five stages, it was simply too short. A proficient player could reach the finish line in around five minutes, and then the game was effectively spent. The update featured four continent-spanning courses, each with a varying number of stages. Beginners could get to grips with the new game on the six-stage Africa course, while experts could tackle the Europe stage, which wound its way through 20 torturous stages. The main new gameplay feature was the inclusion of a turbo button, which boosted your bike to an eye-searing 324kph. Unlike later racing games with a turbo option, such as *Chase HQ* or *Turbo OutRun*, boosting wasn't mainly useful for getting back up to speed after a full-on smash. In *Super Hang-On*, you could only activate the turbo when you reached maximum speed, and as such it was more of a reward for capable, cool-headed players than excitable speed freaks. In addition, the game ran on Sega's *OutRun* hardware, so the extra speed wasn't just a gimmick. It really was faster, and the improved tech also allowed the designers to introduce a more dynamic track that rolled over hills and down dips.

The only thing missing from the *Super Hang-On* experience was the original's famous ride-on model. Instead, Sega produced a stunted 'mini' version, which, while preferable to the stock upright cab, lacked the original's crowd-pulling gravitas. A little-known fact is that the game itself differed depending on whether it was the sit-down or stand-up model. The former was more difficult to play, as you had to throw your weight around rather than just twist the handlebars, so the track layout was kinder, with fewer sharp corners and more open straights.

The game's arcade success ensured that it was soon signed up for home conversions. Somewhat strangely, the original *Hang-On* was largely overlooked on home formats. Versions were released for the Sega SG-1000 – confusingly titled *Hang-On II*, despite both games being pretty much identical – and the MSX. And, of course, there was the popular Master System implementation. *Super Hang-On*, meanwhile, was picked up by Activision and released on a whole range of home computers. Sega itself converted the game to the Mega Drive in 1989 and expanded on the original by adding a new mode where you could earn cash by racing and use it to upgrade your bike.

However, the arcades weren't finished with the series just yet. In 1991 Sega released *Limited Edition Hang-On*, a special remix that took *Super Hang-On* and placed it inside a blue-coloured bike based on the original ride-on model. This rare machine really is the ultimate way of experiencing one of Sega's most iconic racing games. *



# COIN-OP CAPERS

## the expert



With an impressive points haul of more than 39 million, American Mark Twitty is recognised by Twin Galaxies as the Super Hang-On world champion. We chat to the high-score hero

### PROFILE

**» Name:** Mark Twitty
**» Age:** 46
**» Date of birth:** 2 July 1963
**» Hometown:** Orange County, CA, USA
**» Current World Records:**
Super Hang-On [Arcade] 39,381,040 points
Blasteroids [Arcade] 2,773,840 points
Operation Wolf [Arcade] 212,350 points

**■ Can you start by telling us a bit about your gaming interests?**
I grew up in Westminster, California, and spent a lot of time playing videogames and pinball while growing up. I've always liked games with unusual layouts of buttons and controls. I prefer *Stargate* or *Blasteroids* to *Pac-Man* or *Street Fighter*, and also like shooting games and simulators. I liked *Marble Madness* even though the trackball really hurt after a while. For some reason a lot of people didn't want to take the time to learn a new layout, so there was the added bonus of less competition playing those games, which also meant that the games were in better condition.

**■ Can you recall the first time you played *Super Hang-On*?**
I first played it at Mission Control Amusement Center in Garden Grove, California, when it was first released. That is also where I got the high score, playing the Europe course on the upright model. I worked at the arcade part-time, so I had a lot of time to play the new games, and we always kept our games in perfect condition.

**■ When did it dawn on you that you might be pretty good at the game?**
About the time I was able to get through the third course was when I realised no one else was getting close, and after I could get through the Europe course, it was just a matter of improving my time to receive the best bonus at the end.

**■ What were the circumstances behind you getting the Twin Galaxies high score?**
There were some hardcore gamers who entered competitions and such, and they would stop by the arcade frequently. They were protective and secretive about their techniques. I didn't have those qualms, and would show them some of the things I'd learned about the games. One of them was a guy named Greg who submitted my score to Twin Galaxies, and also the other two high scores I have listed there – *Operation Wolf* and *Blasteroids*. He didn't tell me he'd submitted the high scores, though. A friend of my older brother gave me a magazine with my name and high scores for the three games in it several years later.

**■ Did you ever own a *Super Hang-On* cab of your own, or did you practice on MAME?**
I never owned the game. It belonged to the arcade and that's where I played it. The owner, Brad Graveson, closed the




» [Arcade] The trick is to try to take the inside line when cornering.




» [Arcade] Your finger should be poised on the turbo button, ready to take advantage of the extra speed boost.

## Track Attack

Racing takes place across four continents. Here's a quick guide to the sights of Super Hang-On

**Africa**
The Beginner course is the shortest, featuring just six stages. The scenery is barren but offset by Sega's trademark blue skies.





**Asia**
Ten stages make up the Junior course. The twisting track heads through the countryside and a city, and ends up at the coast.

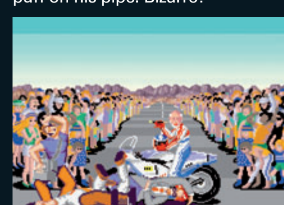
**America**
The Advanced course kicks off in New York and its 14 stages take in the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon.





**Europe**
20 tough stages await those who attempt the Expert course. It begins in Paris then takes you through various areas.

**Finish!**
On finishing Europe, it's revealed that the rider is actually an old man. Gramps has a celebratory puff on his pipe. Bizarre!





place after a problem with some gang members on Thanksgiving in 1994.

**■ All of your TG high scores were recorded on the original arcade machines. Do you have any feelings, positive or negative, about MAME?**
I've played around with machine emulators on my Pocket PC and Mac, but it's nothing like having a dedicated game cabinet. It does bring back good memories, though. I do think emulators are great. How else could I ever own all the games I grew up playing? I guess I should invest some of the money I've saved in buying some better controllers.

**■ Have you been able to achieve better unverified scores on *Super Hang-On* since?**
No, that was my high score of all time for *Super Hang-On*, and it stayed on the machine for years.

**■ You must have wasted a lot of hours perfecting your playing skills. Do you still enjoy gaming?**
I not only wasted a lot of hours learning to play different videogames, but literally years' worth of time. But it was fun, and that's what I did, so I have no regrets about it. It's going to be some time before I can play anything for quite some time, as I broke my wrist this past December and it set wrong, so I had to have surgery to correct it. They cut my radius and took a hammer and chisel to the ulna to re-break it so it could be set correctly. I also have a titanium plate in there screwed onto the radius. So I cannot play anything right now, but I will be able to again when this has completely healed.

**■ Are there any other current TG records that you'd like to try to beat?**
I always wanted the high score on *Stargate*, but I have a friend named Carl Magno who could play for hours and only quit when he had to go home. So even if I got the high score at Twin Galaxies, I'd know that Carl would be out there somewhere and that he could whip me at that game on his worst day. *

# MARK'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

**Expert guidance to help you reach the finish line in record time and amass a huge points bonus**

**1 ■ CURVE RIDER**
All turns have directional arrows pointing the way of the curve. You always want to ride the inside of the curve, so knowing what's up ahead will prepare you to drift across the track to ride the inside of the next curve if the course suddenly changes directions.

**2 ■ SLOW IN, FAST OUT**
You should slack off and decelerate well before the turn, then give it all your speed so that by the time you're through the turn you're almost able to turbo again. You can tell how sharp the curve will be by how closely the directional arrows are placed together – if you notice a tightly packed row of arrows, dump your speed immediately or you'll be flying over them.

**3 ■ TURBO TRICK**
You can steer with the turbo button. If you're on a gentle curve going full out and it gradually starts to become sharper, you'll start to drift and your first instinct will be to either throttle down or let up on the turbo. Instead, if you rapidly tap the turbo it gives you super traction and will actually pull you back into the curve! Once you figure out how the bike responds while doing this, you can steer back and forth between switchback curves or around other riders without slowing at all.

**4 ■ PASS MASTER**
I've never got through the hardest levels without hitting another bike. The important thing is to choose the time and place. If you're going to hit, try to do it on a curve because you're slowing down anyway, and try to be on the inside of the curve with them further out. If you're on the outside of the curve, you'll go flying off the track and into the boonies.

# the sequels

We look at the Sega games that were related to the core Hang-On series



## Hang-On Jr

**Released:** 1985

This is an oddity. At first glance you could be forgiven for thinking that it's a bizarre bootleg, but it's actually an official, scaled-down version of the original *Hang-On* coin-op. It runs on Sega's Z80-powered System E hardware, so in terms of visuals it sits somewhere between the Master System and the coin-op original. However, rather than just a clone, it introduces some of its own features, such as water on the track that causes your bike to skid. There are also ten stages compared to the original's five, and a fun animated sequence awaits you at the finish line.



## Racing Hero

**Released:** 1989

Not one of Sega's better-known titles, *Racing Hero* is the closest thing the arcades saw to a third *Hang-On* game. It basically takes the same rider and drops him in another cross-continent race. It also draws inspiration from *OutRun*, as you race against all sorts of road traffic, including lane-hogging trucks, and you even get to select one of two alternative routes at the end of each stage. It shares Sega's X-Board hardware with games like *After Burner* and *Super Monaco GP*, so the visuals are a bit on the messy side.



## GP Rider

**Released:** 1990

The second motorbike racer from Sega to be powered by its X-Board system. While it looks very similar to *Racing Hero*, the game swaps the open road for a circuit. In addition, the machine supports simultaneous play, allowing two players to race head-to-head around the game's single track. What links *GP Rider* to the *Hang-On* series is that the game was made available in a sit-down version where the two bikes are almost exact replicas of *Super Hang-On*'s mini ride-on model. *GP Rider* also links nicely to the most recent game to bear the *Hang-On* title…



## Hang-On GP

**Released:** 1995

This early release for the Sega Saturn is a continuation of the *Hang-On* series in name only, as its chief inspiration is clearly Namco's *Ridge Racer*. You get to select one of ten bikes and race it around three different tracks. The polygonal graphics are okay, and you can switch between several viewpoints, which is pretty neat, but the controls are incredibly twitchy, it's too easy to wipe out, and racing quickly becomes tiresome. Sega would make amends for this misfire in 1997 with the classy Saturn conversion of its own arcade racer *Manx TT Superbike*.

# COIN-OP CAPERS

## the machine

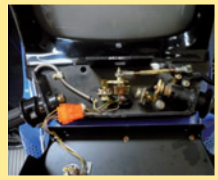
**If you're looking for a souped-up Super Hang-On, the Limited Edition model is the perfect solution – if you can find one, that is**



**Chris Bodicoat has** appeared in **RG** before, showing off his *Double Dragon* cab a few issues back. He's a Sega fan at heart, however. There's no floor space left in his Leicester house for new machines, but he just couldn't say no when a *Limited Edition Hang-On* was offered for sale in Germany late last year.

"It was priced at 250 euros and there hadn't been much interest," says Chris. "The seller wasn't helpful at all. He just wanted someone to turn up and collect it. He told me that the machine would be scrapped as the building where it was housed would be torn down by the end of the year, and this was the week before Christmas! I had a guy ready in Germany to pick it up, but they ran out of time due to terrible weather conditions and lots of hold-ups. I had almost given up, when I was passed on to a company called Lobina Transport, who sent three men on a five-hour round trip to collect the machine on 30 December. The aim was to save this rare machine, even if I had to go to some major lengths to get it shipped over."

### CONTROLS



The control panel has been completely redesigned over the original *Hang-On*. It now has a full cover, as previously you could see the metal brackets with grips bolted on. The inside mechanics have lost the cables used to operate the potentiometers. Instead there are link bars and direct gears, which is an improved design.



### BIKE

Everything is generally in very good condition for a 19-year-old machine. There are some stickers missing but I will probably never find replacements. It would have been nice if it included illuminated dials and a rear working brake light, as sit-down *OutRun* has, but I still think it looks amazing. It's a hard game to play as you lean the bike for the corners, which is how it should be – you need good balance to play. I'd really like to get some more info from Sega about this machine, like how many were made, what made it produce these machines, and if it was just leftover parts that were used up.

### MONITOR

As with many machines, after the long journey it had, I switched it on and got nothing on the screen. Taking off the monitor cover revealed that the tube base had pushed on the fibreglass shell and pulled it off the tube neck. Luckily the tube neck had not broken. I soldered some bad joints on the monitor and re-fitted it better so that the tube base cleared the bike. The monitor had been replaced at some point so this problem still needs to be addressed, but it's back working for now.

### SUPPORT

This part supports the bike and holds it centred upright. It's basically two big springs and rollers, which move when you lean the bike into corners. The wiring on the left is the audio and power supply.

## BOARD



The board is mounted on a piece of wood that slides out the side of the machine like a drawer. All of the electronics are fixed to the wood. The board works fine, but it initially had intermittent sound issues. This probably had something to do with some kind of spillage present on the PCB. I cleaned it off and it seems okay now.

## TURBO BUTTON

The turbo button still works, but it's just missing its red top. *Super Hang-On* has the same button, so I just need to find one and replace it.



## COIN MECH



I would like to change the coin doors as I really like things original. Many operators change them from the old mechanical type to the multi-coin electronic type, but for home use the old ones are more suitable as there's nothing to go wrong.

# developer Q&A

## Most ports were solid, but developer Darrell Etherington tells us what went wrong with the ropey C64 release



**First off, we must apologise for quizzing you about the one game you'd probably rather forget about! Before we get onto the subject of *Super Hang-On*, can you detail your path into games programming?**
I started with some very old mainframes at school, then the ZX80/81 came along and I got hooked on computers. Initially I played around but then started writing software on the Commodore PETs we had at school. This was good fun and good experience. I started the hard way and very early on got into writing in assembler rather than BASIC. When the VIC-20 came out I wrote my first real game with a little help from a long-time friend Andrew Glaister – you may remember him, as he wrote a lot on the Spectrum.

My first game was sold to a computer shop in Southampton while I was on holiday and then I realised I could make proper money from writing games. I went on to work for Anirog Computers, a local company based in Horley, and subsequently worked for an agent in London called Marjacq Micro. Through Marjacq I worked for many companies, including Ariolasoft, EA, Oxford Digital Enterprises and Firebird.

**How did you come to be working on the C64 conversion of *Super Hang-On*?**
Working on *Super Hang-On* was a weird one. From memory it had already been started by someone else, but something happened during development and it was never quite completed, so me and Paul Freeman came on board to finish and enhance the program. There was a discussion about scrapping the game before we got involved.

*[Note: We asked the game's producer Jon Dean if he could shed any light on what happened with the original coder, but he drew a blank. He said: "I don't recall any specifics about the C64 version, other than that Darrell and Paul were superstars and we really enjoyed working with them."]*

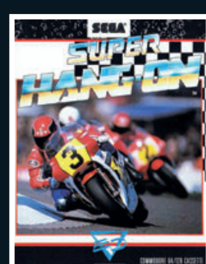
**Can you estimate how much of the game was already complete when you came aboard? Was it a case of optimising the code and polishing the visuals, or did you have to rework elements?**
Quite a lot was complete. It was a case of fixing and tidying up more than rewriting. That said, I do remember we had to change some bits of it to make it workable. If I remember rightly the road movement did not look good, was a bit slow to react and didn't have much in the way of movement. There were some tweaks to stop flicker too.

**How was the workload split between Paul Freeman and yourself?**
The work was split between distinct areas of the game. The track movement being one, the level design, the bike/rider actions and so on. This was the only way you could split a game like this up.

**What did you think of the original arcade game?**
I was very familiar with the original and if I'm honest I didn't like it very much. To me this fell into the category that included the likes of *Pole Position* and were games that always had a predetermined outcome. With practice most people could easily get to the end and once they had done it they could always do it. My preference was for action games like *Defender*, *Robotron*, *Sinistar*… Games that were more of a challenge.

**Did you have access to the original coin-op code during development?**
Not directly, but my local burger shop had one at the time so it was easy to play when required.

**How did you get paid for your work? Was it a flat fee, or royalty-based?**
I can't really remember the exact figures but it was a fee for doing the work that was split into several payments and then there was a percentage of royalties to follow. From memory I don't think there was a huge amount in royalties.

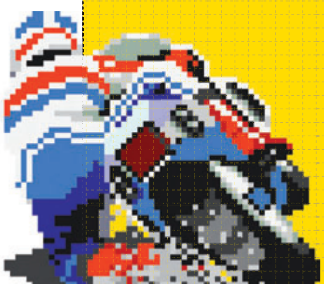



**The game was criticised for being slow. Was trying to improve the frame rate the biggest headache you encountered during the game's development?**
I agree it was slow but we had to work with the code that had already been written and the timelines to publish were tight so we had no option of a rewrite. Using another person's code is tricky as you have to work a lot out before plugging your own routines in. Had we written this from scratch I'm sure we could have improved the speed.

**What's your honest opinion of the finished game?**
I wasn't happy with the final product. It confirmed in my mind that taking over from someone else is always a challenge. I would have preferred a clean start with the necessary time and resources.

**What do you do these days? Are you still involved in games?**
I've moved on a bit since then. I got into data centre design and management, and more recently got promoted to look after the day-to-day global IT operations for Virgin Atlantic, which more than keeps me busy.

# COIN-OP CAPERS
## the conversions



Despite its popularity, Super Hang-On was released on very few machines. But it's quality not quantity that really matters in this race…

02



01



03



### 01. Sharp X68000 (Best Version)

If you want to play the most faithful, slickest, smoothest and best-looking home port of *Super Hang-On*, you'll need to get your hands on a Sharp X68000, or, as that's a pretty big ask, download the fantastic win68 emulator. The X68000 was home to some amazing arcade ports in its time, and this is certainly one of them. As a truly fantastic conversion that ticks every box in our eyes, the Sharp wins this particular race by a mile.

### 02. Mega Drive

This conversion has a very decent stab at replicating the thrills and spills of the coin-op, and is notable for its chunky visuals and 'original' mode, which allows players to partake in a basic career mode that involves repeatedly racing across a single racetrack to win money to spend on motorbike improvements. The fact that the game gives you a 28-digit password every time you wish to return to your career means that you're unlikely to visit this mode more than once before you revert back to the splendid arcade mode.

### 03. ZX Spectrum

While the Speccy version is an admirable effort, driving through a yellow universe gets tedious pretty rapidly. This is still a very decent conversion, though, with our only real gripe being the erratic nature of the rival racers sometimes putting you off your cornering and forcing you to fall foul of the punishing time limit. Our biggest gripe is that there is zero music to treat your grommets, however. Instead, they are forced to make do with sound effects that will have you cranking down the volume button on your television, biting it off and then swallowing it for ear-protection reasons.

### 04. Amstrad CPC

This has all the hallmarks of a straight Speccy port. The visuals and graphics are nigh-on identical, with Electric Dreams failing to make any kind of use of Arnold's fuller colour palette, and it suffers from the same issues as the Spectrum port – namely twitchy gameplay, poor music and unforgiving difficulty. In our opinion, though, this conversion has the slight edge over the Spectrum port, primarily down to it looking a little bit nicer. This is, once again, a functional conversion.

### 05. Atari ST

As you would expect, in most respects this is identical to the Amiga conversion, and as such can hold its head up as one of the best arcade conversions to find its way onto home computers. Where this port edges over the Amiga is probably in the graphics, which look slightly cheerier, but it's let down by having gameplay that isn't nearly as smooth. The sound lacks that awesome guttural kick of the Amiga version too. This is a great conversion of *Super Hang-On*, but isn't quite as good as the Amiga offering.

### 06. Amiga

This is a great port of *Super Hang-On*, and if we were to discount the Sharp X68000 port as it was never released outside Asia, this is easily the best version us Brits can easily lay our hands on. The Amiga port looks brilliant, features great music and sound effects, and features smooth, nippy gameplay to boot, making it a very popular arcade conversion with Amiga owners. Add to this the fact that you could also adjust the sensitivity of the joystick, or play the game with a mouse if you were a weirdo, and this one effortlessly stands in second place on the winners' podium.

### 07. GBA (Sega Arcade Gallery)

Forming one quarter of the games on the *Sega Arcade Gallery* compilation for the Game Boy Advance, *Super Hang-On* is the



















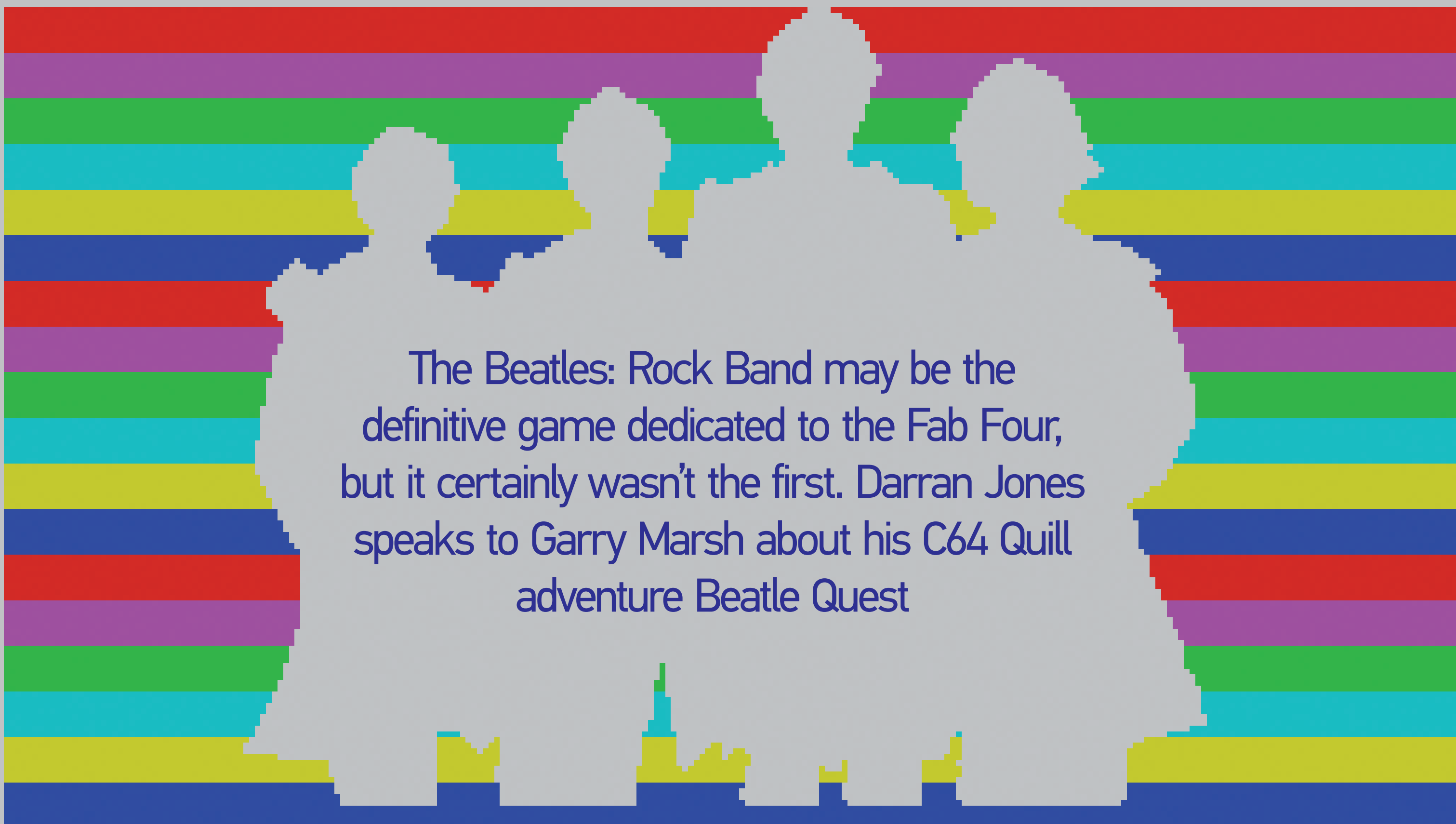
best game to feature on the pack, thanks to the simple nature of its gameplay – only having to worry about steering left or right, essentially – not overworking the console's tiny buttons. At first glance this port looks like a slightly pared-down version of the Sharp conversion, but closer inspection reveals graphics that are not as smooth or defined. We did find the controls and bike a little unresponsive at times, making it a bit harder to round corners, but otherwise this is a decent handheld offering.

## 08. DOS

The garish EGA visuals of this conversion certainly look colourful, but they lack any detail. The drivers also look stubby, giving the impression that they're racing mopeds rather than powerful GP motorcycles. Thankfully, this thing drives better than it looks. At the time, though, racing games were a rarity on the PC, so this one managed to find a moderate-sized fan base on its release. This conversion's not dreadful; it's just not especially great either. Graphically, this is essentially the C64 port but with clown make-up on.

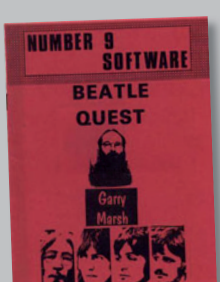
## 09. C64 (Worst Version)

This arcade conversion is quite possibly up there with *Chase HQ* in terms of Commodore 64 direness – and maybe even worse. The C64 port of *Super Hang-On* gets off to a promising start by showing us a good recreation of the level select screen and giving us a choice of what music we wish to listen to, but once into the game itself it quickly pulls a sharp 180 before driving off a cliff face and dying a horrible death in the flaming wreckage left behind. The graphics look lifeless and washed out, and the scrolling is so erratic that it renders the entire experience completely joyless. The music's good, though.



The Beatles: Rock Band may be the definitive game dedicated to the Fab Four, but it certainly wasn't the first. Darran Jones speaks to Garry Marsh about his C64 Quill adventure Beatle Quest

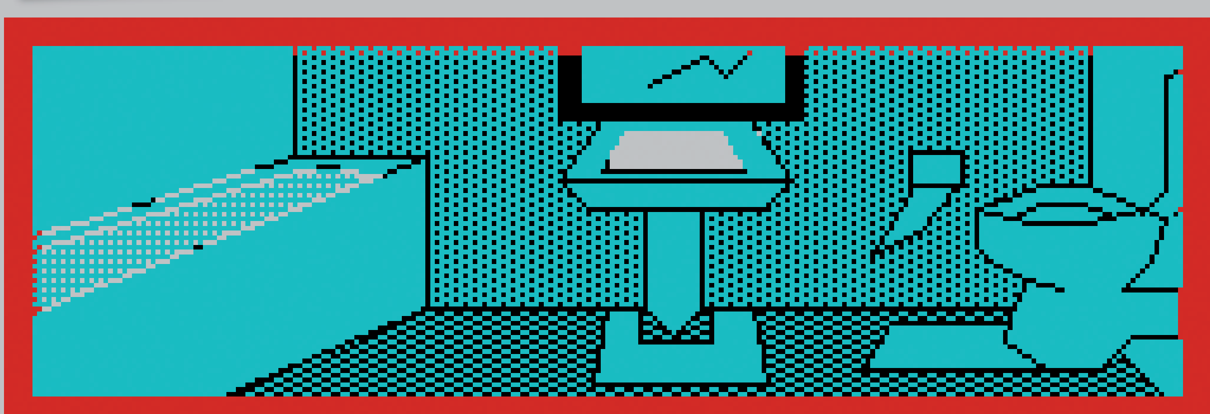
# BEATLE QUEST

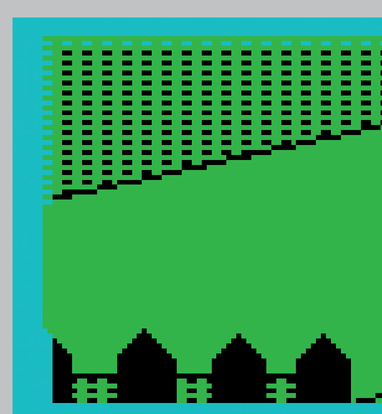



## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NUMBER 9 SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** GARRY MARSH
- » **PLATFORM:** C64/SPECTRUM
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+







**So, Garry, where did the idea for *Beatle Quest* originate?**
I've been a Beatles fan and collector since 1963, when I was just nine years old. I've still got most of the stuff, scrapbooks, pictures that I kept from the original game. I even put some memorabilia into the second adventure, but that's still in the works some 24 years later. I'll get around to it one day; things like nylon stockings, dresses, posters, books galore, magazines, and so on. Oh, and records too!

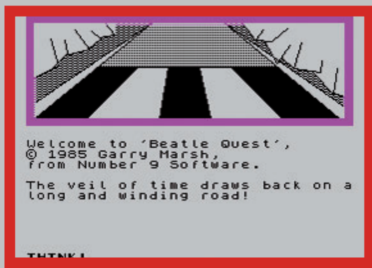
I was having fun playing lots of text adventure games, and it just struck me that the lyrics to many of John Lennon and Paul McCartney's songs had characters and storylines that could be woven together to make a game. There are about 150 characters in all of the songs – I call them Beatlyricals – such as Mean Mr Mustard, Polythene Pam, Jude, Mr Kite, and so on.



**Did it prove difficult to actually acquire the licence for The Beatles?**
I saw somewhere a reference to Rocksoft, a company that were licensing songs for computer games, and I went through them. I think I approached ATV Music/Northern Songs and they indicated that Rocksoft were handling all of their stuff. It really wasn't that difficult to put together, but the contract itself is about 25 pages long and it took about three months to get it passed.

**Was there any actual approval process that you had to go through?**
It was pretty straightforward, to be honest. I had to send a copy of the game and the lyrics that I had used to Rocksoft, although I don't think anyone actually tried it out. They just had to believe what I said was in the game. I guess they really didn't care; they just rubber-stamped it.

I sent copies to the Beatles themselves – three of them anyway, and Yoko Ono. Paul's office misunderstood and sent it




» As opening screens go, it doesn't get much more iconic than the crossing at Abbey Road.

back saying they didn't produce computer games, and I never heard from George – probably because he was playing it! Yoko's men sent it back unopened, and Ringo took it to his solicitors, who tried to get me to remove it from sale for the "tort of passing off". I never claimed it was a Beatles product; it was just what it was: a text adventure game based on Beatles lyrics. I told them to do their worst! They did nothing, but it cost me about £85 in solicitor's fees to write letters to them. I guess those files are now worth something. They were from a really upmarket firm in the Four Inns.

**Did you ever get to meet the Beatles?**
No. I missed seeing them in Toronto, 17 August 1966 at the Maple Leaf Gardens. I was only 12 at the time, and they only had the worst seats – the greys – available. So we didn't go! Big regret, though I have seen Paul perform once, and Ringo & His All-Starr Band twice.

**Do you know if they played the game? If they did, what did they think about it?**
Don't know, don't know… John would have liked it, but not as much as he did playing with his Scalextric.

**Whose idea was it to fill the game with references to Beatles lyrics?**
Just mine. That was the whole idea: you had to be a Beatles fan and know




something about the lyrics. It was all very anorak. It's all in the mind, you know: nothing is real, that sort of thing; a helter skelter of words… can't stop now… you can't do that… we can work it out!

**How long did the game take to create and what were the biggest problems you encountered?**
Finding time, as we were just starting a family. It took me about six months to write and put into *The Quill*. The biggest problem I faced was simply testing it time and time again.

**Why did you decide to use *The Quill* to create *Beatle Quest*?**
*Quill* was just really fun and easy to use, and I couldn't do it any other way because I'm not an actual programmer.

Also, it meant that once I had completed it, it could be easily converted to other machines that also ran *The Quill*. Sadly, I only got around to converting it to the Spectrum because life got in the way… "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans" – John Lennon.

**Were you pleased with the scores it received at the time?**
Very much so. It got only one bad review, by a guy called Simon Marsh – no relation, though our eldest son is also called Simon Marsh – who complained that it had no music in the game! It would have been nice to sell thousands and thousands of copies, but that wasn't really the idea.

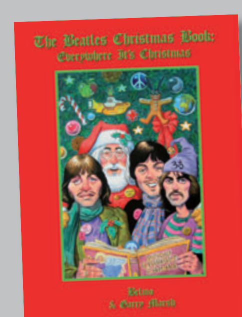
**Who designed the striking cover art?**
The cover was by Alan Aldridge, who used to work for The Beatles, and I had to pay a royalty to use it.

**Have you played *The Beatles: Rock Band*? What did you think of it?**
My youngest son Alex, 22, has it, and plays it a lot. I like to listen and watch all the groovy pictures, man. It's very good, but not really my bag.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Originally written by Graeme Yeandle in 1983 and published by Gilsoft, *The Quill* was an excellent way of allowing gamers to create their own adventures. Originally it only allowed users to use a verb-noun parser, but a later add-on called *The Illustrator* eventually allowed the use of illustrations.

*The Quill* became a huge critical success, with *Micro Adventurer* going so far as to call it "a product to revolutionise the whole microcomputer scene". Its amazing ease of use and massive database of words enabled many developers to use it for their games and, as a result, more than 450 titles were commercially released that make use of Yeandle's clever utility, including *The Balrog And The Cat*, *Lords Of Magic*, *Seabase Delta* and *Wizard Quest*.



## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**BEATLE QUEST**
SYSTEM: C64/SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

**BABY YOU CAN DRIVE MY CAR**
SYSTEM: BOOK
YEAR: 1990

**THE BEATLES CHRISTMAS BOOK: EVERYWHERE IT'S CHRISTMAS**
SYSTEM: BOOK
YEAR: 2009



# Neil Thompson

## What cherished games would you take to the island?

**Neil Thompson has been painting with pixels and polygons for over two decades, having his artistic hand in projects from Nitro to Motorstorm. Paul Drury hears about cars, camels and Chuckie Egg**

**Neil fixed it for Jim. When in 1988 some enthusiastic tyke wrote to the BBC's wish-granting *Jim'll Fix It* programme asking for their supermarket sweep game idea to become reality, the cigar-chuffing Saville turned to the guys and gals at Icon Design to make it happen.**

"No-one wanted to do it," says Neil, shaking his head. "I don't know what money changed hands but we had a ludicrously short time to do it in. It was the first time I had to do graphics on a C64 and I had to input it pixel-by-pixel using a joystick. C64 graphics were an art in their own right, and the guys who were good at it were really, really good. I sucked at it and did a terrible job. I remember the reviews coming out and giving the graphics two out of ten. I'll take that to my grave…"

Which is where the awful *Super Trolley* should probably be buried, too. It was an odd early assignment for the young Neil to be tasked with, but then he'd never expected to be making games in the first place. Of course, growing up in Britain in the Seventies meant there was a Binatone TV Game at home and *Space Invaders* down the chippie, but his real love was art, not computers. He dropped out of his A-levels early, much to the chagrin of his academic parents, with the intention of becoming a freelance illustrator.

"The arrogance of youth," laughs Neil. "I went to a good school and if it taught me anything it was to be a bit cocky about my ability. 'I can draw, so I can make it as an artist!' The reality was very different. It died a death and I ended up selling carpets to make ends meet."

But this was no ordinary shop. When the shopkeeper appeared, it turned out his son ran a little software developer and, recognising Neil's artistic talent, he opened up a door leading to a whole new world.




Neil was especially pleased when the intro to Lifeforce: Tenka was described by a games hack as 'f*cking arthouse'

"They took a punt on me, which was quite brave of them as, at the time, there weren't really artists in the industry, just coders that did their own graphics. I'd like to think they were forward-thinking, seeing that the technology was coming that would let us produce images of the kind of quality I was showing them in my portfolio. I'm not sure if that's the truth though!"

So, in 1987, Neil left the shag pile behind and moved into a Portakabin behind the Icon Design shop front in Prestwich. The company, previously known for the jingoistic *Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona!*, tended to assign a coder and an artist to each project, and Neil was soon rocking.

"I cut my teeth doing a Speccy version of *Boulder Dash*," he says, referring to *Rockford*. "It was a good introduction, as it involved converting colour graphics to black and white. I took those skills into *Kikstart 2* and was delighted to do animated sprites. Those flamethrowers are mine!"

As the 16-bit machines began to take over from the old guard, Neil was handed another 8-bit entity to update. *Revenge of the Mutant Camels 2* was to bring Jeff Minter's laser-spitting ungulates to the Amiga, and Neil had a crucial role in the project.

"I did the camel!" he exclaims with some gusto. "That was the first project I worked on that I was aware had a recognised following, even though it was a conversion. I knew there was some kind of kudos in saying I did the camels in *Revenge 2*, and it felt good! You kind of take it for granted these days that people will know the console you write for, if not the actual games themselves, but back then, if I told people I made graphics for computer games, they had no understanding that anyone could do that for a living, let alone have heard of the games or the machines."

### Trivia

**Thanks to some primitive blue-screening techniques using a roll of wallpaper, Neil's motion-captured figure appears in *Dracula* on the Mega Drive as Renfield.**

Given Neil's obvious pride at his contribution to the project, we feel a little mean pointing out that Minter has since described the game as 'an absolute dog of a conversion that has relentlessly eradicated every ounce of playability' – hardly a glowing recommendation. "That was not the best and most talented game studio you could work for," acknowledges Neil with a grin. "It was somewhere I could get into the industry and I made a lot of good friends, but I don't think anyone who worked there would call it cutting-edge… Jeff's probably entirely right!"

Undeterred, Neil's next project also revisited a much-loved early Eighties icon. Doug Anderson, the 'A' in A&F Software



"Psygnosis was regarded as the pinnacle for game art back then. They were the men!"

*And Neil was more than happy to join his heroes…*

FAMOUS FOR
Pushing the graphical envelope

FIRST JOB
Clay pigeon ranger

CURRENT JOB
Studio Art Director, Bizarre Creations

FAVOURITE FILM
Blade Runner

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Rubicon by Tangerine Dream

FAVOURITE BOOK
The Baroque Cycle by Neal Stephenson

FIRST COMPUTER
BBC Micro

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
100 million on Star Wars (cockpit cabinet)

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
F1 series

BEST HOLIDAY
Disneyland with the family

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Jack Nicholson. He'd be good value on a desert island

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SEX
M

NAME
Neil Thompson

DATE OF BIRTH
24 MAR 1969

PLACE OF BIRTH
Sale,

BIOGRAPHY
Neil began at Icon Design before moving to Psygnosis as the Amiga and then PlayStation rose to prominence. He has worked on many cutting edge racing games from the seminal WipEout to the forthcoming Blur.

# Timeline

1987 · 1988 · 1989 · 1990

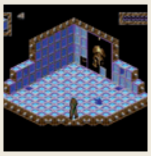
**ROCKFORD: THE ARCADE GAME**
■ **YEAR:** 1987
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Neil's first job in the industry was converting the graphics from the *Boulder Dash*-inspired coin-op.



**CHUCKIE EGG**
■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **VERSION:** Amiga
Despite a graphical makeover that turned the famous farmer into an egg, the gameplay remained true to the addictive platforming of the original.



**NEVER MIND**
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **VERSION:** Amiga
An imaginative puzzler with 250 levels and an ingenious 'boss mode' that threw charts up on the screen when management walked past…

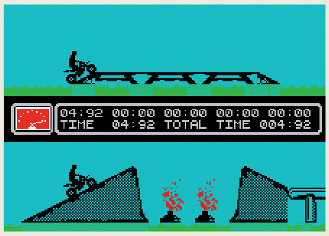


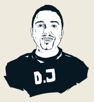
**NITRO**
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **VERSION:** Amiga
An overhead racer that not only proved entertaining in multiplayer, it suggested Roger Moore and Steve Davis were separated at birth.



## The Team On Thompson

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Neil's games…





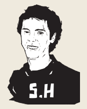
**Darran Jones**
I used to adore playing *Kikstart 2* on my mate's Spectrum and *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge* is one of my most-played PSP racers, so it's interesting to discover that Neil was involved with both of them. And then, of course, there's *Microcosm*, a game that looked amazing thanks to Neil but was a bit of a disappointment in the gameplay department.





**Paul Drury**
Going from pixellated motorbikes on the Spectrum 20-something years ago to photorealistic racing on modern consoles has been quite a journey for Neil, but his enthusiasm for his art and love of games remains undiminished. Besides, anyone who's had a hand in one of Jeff Minter's camels is all right by me.





**Stuart Hunt**
Having worked on and contributed to games for some of the bestselling computers and consoles of all time – as well as a couple that were not so triumphant – Neil's career as an artist is one that charts the impressive leap that videogames have taken graphically and technologically in such a short space of time. A very impressive portfolio.



that had published the original *Chuckie Egg*, had gone on to be one of the founders of Icon Design and thus updating their IP for the 16-bits made sound financial sense.

"I think they decided it would be a good way of milking the cash cow," winks Neil. "You know, I don't think I really did any research into the original game other than look at a few screenshots. I thought it'd be a good idea to change the lead character from a farmer into an egg. I was listening to stuff like Anthrax back then, so I gave the egg a baseball cap and boots. Not sure if that was a successful strategy…"

Scrambling up the formula may not have endeared Neil to Beeb-loving purists, but the game did show how things were progressing graphically with digitised pictures for the backgrounds, modified using the Amiga's *DigiPaint* package. With the powerful *Dpaint* also at his disposal, Neil teamed up with coder Steve Riding and, under the new banner of Lothlorien, set to work on the 3D puzzler *Never Mind*.

> **"For Dracula, we weren't allowed to use blood or show any religious iconography, which is slightly limiting when doing a vampire game"**
> *Neil on having the teeth taken out of a project*





» [Amiga] *Nebulus* on the Amiga. Neil did the bricks that built the tower…

"It was the brainchild of a guy called Prof who used to work at Icon," recalls Neil. "He was a fantastic character, your quintessentially bearded guy who thinks in binary. What became really difficult was coming up with the ideas for the images for each level. We couldn't use photos or anything copyrighted, so I remember pulling my hair out trying to come up with little 8-to-16 frame animated motifs that looked interesting and people would want to put together. Everything was hand-drawn, which was laborious but good fun."

*ACE* magazine described the leftfield title as being 'peppered with graphical delights', something that must have caught the attention of publisher Psygnosis. The game had been released through its Psyclapse label (the name was a nod to the company's roots in Imagine Software, and the ill-fated C64 megagame), an off-shoot that specialised in riskier projects. Thus, when coder Steve joined Psygnosis in Liverpool, he suggested the company hire his old partner.

"I was absolutely over the moon," enthuses Neil. "At that point, Psygnosis was regarded as the pinnacle for game art. They were the men! There wasn't anything better, and the opportunity to work with them was a big deal. I'm pretty sure I was the last person to be personally interviewed by Ian Hetherington. It was tiny then; just 15 or 20 people."

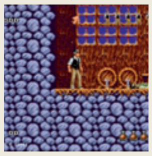
Neil arrived at his new workplace to discover he'd be sharing an office with some of his heroes. "There was Jeff Bramfitt, Lee Carus, Garvan Corbett, who'd worked on *Barbarian* and the sequel. I mean, he was a legend. Everyone remembers those sprites. And Jim Bowers' intro to *Shadow*

1993



**MICROCOSM**
■ **YEAR:** 1993
■ **VERSION:** FM Towns
Set inside the human body, this used pioneering fractal graphics techniques to create the veins and arteries of your internal organs. Nice.

1993



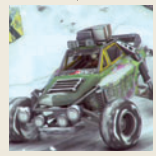
**DRACULA**
■ **YEAR:** 1993
■ **VERSION:** Mega Drive
Based on the film. This was a competent if uninspiring platformer, with some neat graphical touches but no real bite.

2000

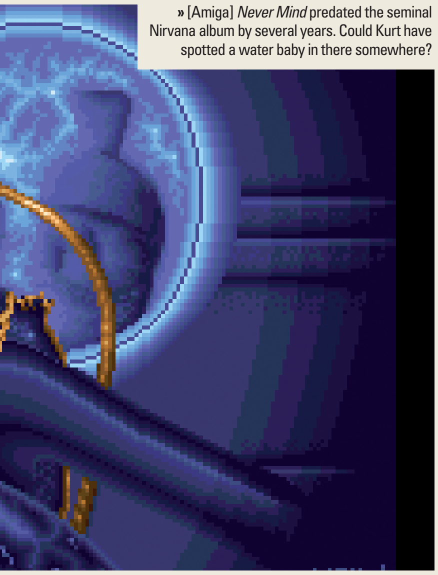


**N-GEN RACING**
■ **YEAR:** 2000
■ **VERSION:** PlayStation
More futuristic racing, this time with jets, from Neil and other *WipEout* team members in their first post-Psygnosis project as Curly Monsters.

2009



**MOTORSTORM: ARCTIC EDGE**
■ **YEAR:** 2009
■ **VERSION:** PSP
Varied vehicles and wide-open roads in the this impressive portable version of the popular PS3 racer.



» [Amiga] *Never Mind* predated the seminal Nirvana album by several years. Could Kurt have spotted a water baby in there somewhere?

*Of The Beast*. That was an accomplished piece of art, not something throwaway. Jimmy especially had a huge influence on me in terms of what could be achieved through the medium of computers. The guys weren't looking to the past, how we could emulate what others have done in the past, but looking to future. How far can we push these machines?"

These were exciting times but, while the old hands worked on big titles like *Shadow Of The Beast 2* and *The Killing Game Show*, the new boy was asked to turn his attention to a top-down racer that had been in production for a while. Programmer Jamie Woodhouse had submitted a demo, which boss Ian Hetherington had liked, but wanted one of his own team to do the graphics. "That was the way it worked back then," explains Neil. "All coders were freelance and we had studio artists. There were no specific level designers, so I came up with a desert level and the apocalyptic one at the end. I'd draw tracks, like a bend here, a straight there…"

This working relationship, Jamie at home in Sheffield and Neil in-house in Liverpool, produced 1990's *Nitro*, a fondly remembered overhead racer that particularly excelled in multiplayer. As the studio expanded, Neil worked on many more Amiga titles, contributing art to projects as diverse as the two-wheeled *Red Zone*, *Carthage* and the disappointing *Aquaventura*. "That had a tortured development," chuckles Neil. "We didn't have a QA department; we would all just test games on a Friday afternoon and look for any bugs. I'm sure lots of our stuff went out horribly bug-riddled, but back then, we didn't have a say in whether we thought a game was crap… nor expected one!"

Despite this somewhat laissez-faire approach to quality assurance, Psygnosis was always looking for the next leap forward. Neil joined a small group within the company set up to look at the emerging CD-based platforms, such as the CD32, the 3DO and Fujitsu's FM Towns. "We started bringing in Silicon Graphics machines, which cost a fortune, but Ian went with us on it. He was very forward thinking and was always looking for the next powerful machine. He knew the Amiga had a shelf-life and was looking at what could make games look even better. And he wasn't blind to the commercial opportunities, of course!"

In retrospect, this pioneering work might have yielded greater financial rewards if it hadn't initially focussed on the FM Towns as a platform, for it was on this now-forgotten console that Psygnosis released *Awesome* and *Microcosm*. The former was an Amiga conversion, but the latter was an original title, involving a *Fantastic Journey*-style trip into the human body. For Neil, too, it involved getting inside the role…

"We decided it wasn't enough to have CGI anymore, we needed live action! We had no idea how to do this but Jimmy had some idea how it was done in movies. We made costumes, scripts were written and we went to B&Q and bought a huge roll of blue paper and stuck it up in room in the offices. Someone wrote a little thing in Photoshop to extract the live image and we pasted it together with Softimage. You can pick out shots from *Aliens*, *Escape From New York* and more of Jimmy's favourites, done in our own unique way. The performances are horrific but it's quite an interesting piece."

You can find this highly entertaining piece of am-dram on YouTube, though Neil suggests having a drink first. With

## Whatever happened to…?

"Three come to mind," says Neil, when asked about any lost projects during his long career. "At Lothlorien, in the very early days of the Amiga, there was *Space Salvage*, a 3D game kind of like *Elite* with space trading and combat. I was working on that with Phil Betts, who later came to Psygnosis. If we'd had more time it could've been very nice, but we both moved on.

*Vale of Shadows*, for the Commodore 64 and PC, was a kind of Elven fantasy, where you created a character and went on quests. I spent months designing the Elves and the system whereby you could change their appearance, but it just never went anywhere.

Then there was *Chainsaw Warrior* for the Amiga, a side-scrolling shooter based on a little-known Games Workshop board game of same name. The only graphical reference I had was the box cover, an overly muscled, blond, crew-cutted figure with armour on one hand and a chainsaw in the other, doing exactly what you'd expect dressed like that. That disappeared into the ether too, like so many projects…"

The Lothlorien lads in 1988 with Neil sporting a healthy ginger mop





## Thompson on Thompson

Neil picks his three favourite projects from his bulging portfolio, and a career that spans three decades



### ■ NEVER MIND

It got me noticed by Psygnosis and without that I wouldn't have had a career. Even though it isn't my favourite game by any stretch of the imagination, having done it and then –and to have a [game developer] like Psygnosis recognise my talent – meant it had a huge impact.



### ■ QUANTUM REDSHIFT

We proved the point that six guys could make a complete game in 18 months if they all had experience and knew what they were doing. It was a very happy time – a bunch of friends got together, wrote a game and didn't kill each other. We did what we set out to do.

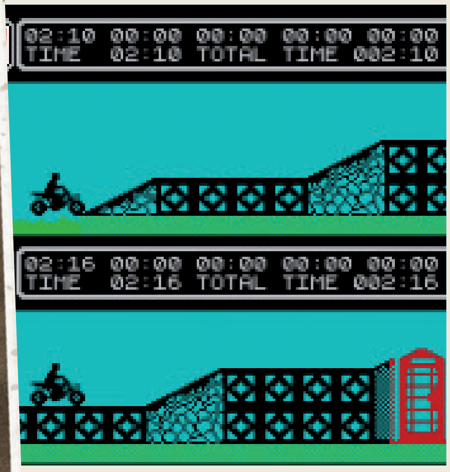


### ■ F1 CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

In terms of game development, I've never worked on a title with fewer problems… We had to produce it across three platforms, and we didn't have the final PS3 hardware so we were working on guesstimates… we guessed right!

Neil does some Formula One 'fieldwork'






» [Spectrum] You can blame Neil for the flamethrowers in *Kikstart 2*.

# Readers' Questions

**Merman:** What was it like working with the FM Towns hardware, when CD was such a fledgling format?

**It was both refreshing and restrictive in the same breath. We could do so much more because the machines were capable of displaying so much more, but the problems came in being able to drag that information off the disk fast enough. It was giving with one hand but taking away with the other. That was the challenge.**

**Necronom:** What made you choose Steve Davis, Clint Eastwood, and John Rambo as the three driver options in *Nitro*?

**It's not Steve Davis, it's Roger Moore! Look again! These were the days before licensed likenesses and all of those sorts of issues. I just had to pick and draw three faces. I'm a bit of a film buff. I love Clint Eastwood's Spaghetti Westerns and that image is actually from a frame of *High Plains Drifter*. Everyone likes Rambo, and Roger Moore is the epitome of cool.**

**Gabe:** Do you almost feel 'typecast' as being involved in racers?

**Yes and unfairly so, I think. Studios can be typecast but members of studios shouldn't be. It's a good question, and I've come up against that a lot. I don't consider myself to be a racing game specialist. I've done a lot of them and enjoy them but, in terms of the artwork I've done for those games, I don't think developing a good-looking environment is any different to developing one for an action adventure or anything else for that matter. Actually, at Bizarre right now I'm overseeing *Blur*, but also an action-adventure title… which I can't talk about!**

**Lanky316:** Do you use the same principles when designing tracks now as you did in the early days, or do you find that gamers in the modern era want something different?

**The challenge now is to give people more than they expect. With games like *Blur*, *Split/Second* and *MotorStorm*, it seems like it's no longer enough to give people a nice car to take out onto a nicely rendered track. The track's got to fall apart or blow up in front of you! Which is fine because you have to push the genre forward, but the techniques of designing a track that is going to change is fundamentally different to designing one that is static.**

**Necronom:** Which machine did/do you like working on most, and which is the most difficult to design for?

**From a purely artistic standpoint, I liked the Amiga most. The PlayStation 3 was the biggest challenge. The way we had to think about developing graphics changed when that came in. Everything changed.**

**Merman:** What's your favourite viewpoint for playing a racing game?

**Got to be bumper cam!**

**The Master:** Who is your favourite Dr Who?

**Tom Baker. The only one!**

Psygnosis' pioneering work in 3D, it was approached by Sony to handle the film license to Columbia's forthcoming *Dracula* – though, oddly, it became a standard 2D Mega Drive platformer, albeit it with some fancy rendered backgrounds, rather than exploiting these recent breakthroughs. "We all trooped down to Pinewood Studios to see the rushes and meet the producer Fred Fuchs, which was quite an exciting experience," says Neil. "The reality of writing the game was something else entirely. We weren't allowed to use blood or show any religious iconography for a start… slightly limiting when doing a *Dracula* game."

With this odd Vampiric interlude over, it was back to the future. Neil was involved in some of the conceptual work for *WipEout* before being moved over to lead artist on *Lifeforce: Tenka*, another early PlayStation title. Given the importance anti-grav racing was to have in bringing games to a new, hip audience, is that a lasting annoyance, Neil?

"We thought we had something with *Tenka*. Early demos had the character on screen in third-person, with lots of problem solving. This was pre-*Tomb Raider*. But it got diluted, went first-person and had some pretty big flaws. At that time, Liverpool was the centre of dance music in the UK. We were all in our early twenties, going out to clubs like Cream, and *WipEout* was going to reflect our time, our culture, our values, our sound. I suppose I'm glad I had at least a minor part in that."

The huge success of *WipEout* contributed to Sony taking over Psygnosis, and Neil was made Studio Director of its new Manchester office, where he oversaw development of PC title *Lander* and *The Contract* for the PlayStation. The latter was never completed. "That year was possibly the worst of my life," confesses Neil. "I'd been moved into management and I didn't feel I was ready. Lots of money was being thrown round, not just by Psygnosis, and studios were getting large very quickly. More people, more projects – but there's a specific set of skills you need to work in games, not just people who can use software. You need experience of the development cycle. Some of us believed you could make a game with six guys if they knew what they were doing."

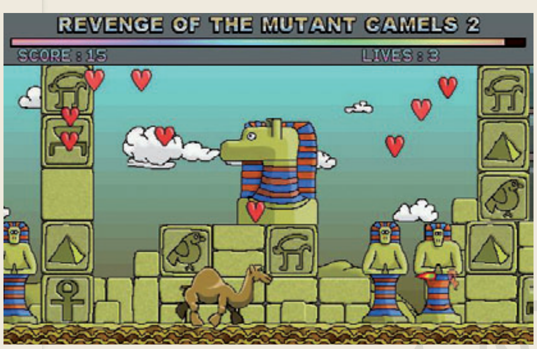
> "WipEout was going to reflect our time, our culture, our values, our sound"
>
> *Not even gravity could stop those Psygnosis boys…*

**Trivia**

**Neil's all-time favourite piece of software is *DPaint* on the Amiga, as he believes 'a limited palette lends itself to an ordered mind'. Heavy.**

And that's just what they decided to prove. In the late Nineties, Neil, Chris Roberts, Lee Carus, Martin Linklater, Chris Burcombe and Andy Satterthwaite left Psygnosis to form Curly Monsters and, over the following years, produced two fine futuristic racers: *N-Gen Racing* and *Quantum Redshift* for the PlayStation and Xbox, respectively. Neil remembers it as a wonderful ride but sadly, when a publisher couldn't be found for the sequel to *Redshift*, they had to break up the band. Neil returned to Sony and worked on several iterations of their *F1* and *Motorstorm* series, and even revisited his past with *WipEout HD*. Earlier this year he moved to Bizarre Creations as Studio Art Director, which means he's overseeing state-of-the-art racer *Blur*. Do you ever wonder how you got from plotting pixels for *Kikstart* on the Spectrum to photorealism on the PS3, Neil?

"'To be honest I wonder how the hell I got to the start," he laughs. "I completely fell into computer games, totally by chance. But the industry has always been about getting the best from limited parameters. The parameters get ever wider but the best artists and studios will always want to push those parameters and have bigger expectations and ideals than we can possibly meet. That's what pushes things on and makes us an exciting industry."




» [Amiga] *Revenge of the Mutant Camels 2* found little love from Yak…

Neil Thompson's

# Desert Island Disks

The games that Neil Thompson just couldn't live without, and why he loves them

## 01 Galaxian ARCADE

It was awesome. Everything that *Space Invaders* was meant to be. Genius. I love it. I used to play in on an arcade machine in a chippie in Sale when I was thirteen. We'd just pile ten-pences into the machine and play it for hours. I still get that feeling of being trapped at the side of the screen and not being able to do anything about it…

## 02 Phoenix ARCADE

Just blasting everything! We had a machine in the sixth form common room at school and again used to play it for ages. I picked it up again at Sony when MAME came out. A friend and I used to play it and it was still just as much fun now as it was then. Shooting out the guff underneath the mothership is still great.

## 03 Sensible Soccer AMIGA

It's still the best footie game. Nothing comes close. The immediacy of control, and it felt so satisfying to put the ball in the top corner from thirty yards.

## 04 Stunt Car Racer AMIGA

I have fond memories of playing it in the early days of Psygnosis. We'd link up two Amigas and two guys would play it across the room from each other. A *Stunt Car Racer* battle – great fun!

## 05 Half-Life PC

We played this and *Quake* a lot at Curly Monsters. The five of us had great fun, downing tools at six in the evening and spend an hour or two blasting. Well, camping. People would camp for ages in rocks and then pick you off. It would drive people insane.

## 06 Quake PC

This was just a blast-a-thon. If it had been a long day, someone would load up the game and it would say 'READY' through the speakers, and everyone would just throw their keyboards away and just jump onto *Quake*. We'd blast away for an hour or two.

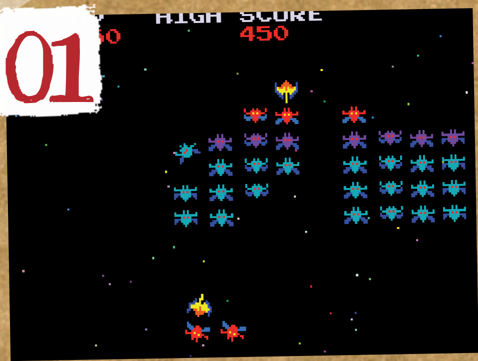
## 07 Everybody's Golf PS3

I like golf games. I realised it when back in the day I used to work with a bloke called Marcus Goodie at Psygnosis and he'd coded *Microprose Golf*. We used to play it at lunchtime. I'm not a golf fan but computer golf is ace! I remember on *Microprose*, you'd boot the ball down the fairway and it would unerringly find that tiny polygon of water. Ever since, I've been looking for a version that was as satisfying to play… and then *Everybody's Golf* came along. Wonderful!

## 08 Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2 PS3

In recent years, it's been the one game I've kept returning to and played for a significant amount of time to get to the end. So, that's my fairly eclectic selection of games!

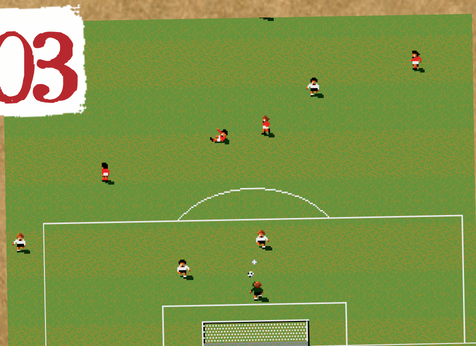
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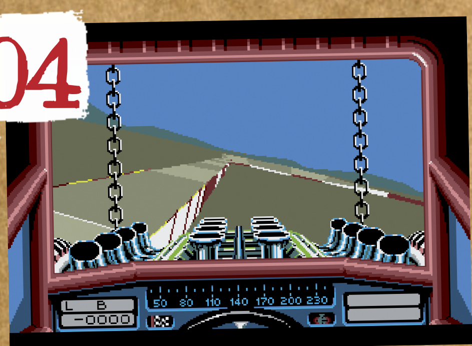

02




03



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07



08





# Karnov

## SO WHAT DO BABY FOOD AND VIDEOGAMES HAVE IN COMMON?

» RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» DATA EAST
» 1987

**When looking back at the various videogame mascots that have graced our screens over the years, Data East's Karnov must surely rank as the most peculiar. Though we couldn't find any firm evidence to support this, according to a few sources on the internet, Karnov was said to have been ostensibly based on a medieval legend named Karnov The Firespitter; a bald strongman who used to scare gypsies away in by flexing his giant muscles, spitting fireballs and eating babies.**

Internet rumours aside, Data East's videogame take on the Karnov The Firespitter was thankfully far more tamer than the supposed legend he was based on. *Karnov* was a side-scrolling platform shoot-'em-up, which saw you guiding a stubby ball of muscle that was decorated with a infant's face and a Fu Manchu moustache through nine stages of platforming action to find various parts of a map that pointed to the whereabouts of a valuable treasure.

It was notable for being pretty challenging – which came from casting a slow, podgy man in a platform game – and for having a wide variety of enemies to fight, ranging from Ray Harryhausen-style skeletons riding ostriches, demons, bats, mummies, tree people, mermen, dinosaurs, wizards and even seagulls. In fact, if you were to scribble something random on a piece of paper I'd say there would be a good chance that whatever you drew – or at least something very similar – would show its face somewhere in the game.

Data East also blessed Karnov with a dizzying array of power-ups, which gave the character a real sense of resourcefulness. Karnov could acquire speed shoes, produce ladders at will to reach inaccessible parts of the level, drop bombs, throw boomerangs, and even fly with the help of some power-up wings.

When the game found success in arcades, Data East then adopted Karnov as its mascot, and then bizarrely used the character to play the role of villain in its games – most notably in the titles *Dragon Ninja* and *Fighters Destiny*. A strange thing to do with your company mascot we think you'll agree, but then, as we've just explained, Karnov isn't your normal videogame hero. *

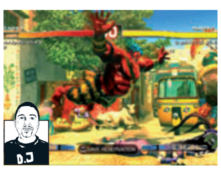


# RETRORATED



>> It's a beat-'em-up special this issue, as Super Street Fighter IV, BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger and Samurai Shodown Sen all go head-to-head. If that's not enough, we also take a look at the new Sin & Punishment and the excellent 3D Dot Heroes

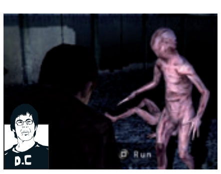
### PICKS OF THE MONTH



**DARRAN**
**Super Street Fighter IV**
Two brand new fighters, amazing new Ultras, no wonder I can't get enough of it.



**STUART**
**Espgaluda II**
An amazing port and because it's on Darran's iPhone I can play it when he's not looking.



**DAVID**
**Silent Hill: Shattered Memories**
Konami reboots its classic franchise in style. More please.

>> SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

# Super Street Fighter IV

## ONE YEAR ON AND STILL THE BEST

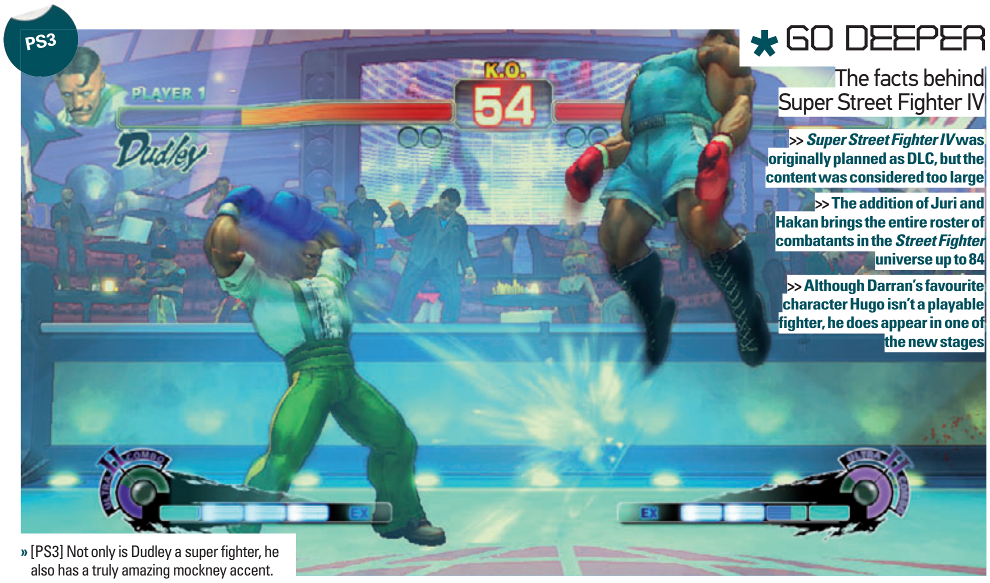
PS3

### INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99
» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** DIMPS/IN-HOUSE
» **PLAYERS:** 1-2

### BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Street Fighter* was released in 1987 and featured huge, pressure-sensitive pads that you hammered when fighting opponents. Things were greatly improved for the sequel, and the franchise has now gone on to become one of the best examples of the genre. *Super Street Fighter IV* features a massive 35 playable characters.




» [PS3] Not only is Dudley a super fighter, he also has a truly amazing mockney accent.

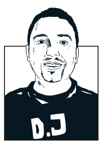
### GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Street Fighter IV

>> ***Super Street Fighter IV* was originally planned as DLC, but the content was considered too large**

>> **The addition of Juri and Hakan brings the entire roster of combatants in the *Street Fighter* universe up to 84**

>> **Although Darran's favourite character Hugo isn't a playable fighter, he does appear in one of the new stages**



**A lot has happened since the release of *Street Fighter IV*, namely the complete reinvigoration of a once stagnant genre. Sure they've always been around, but the quality has increased significantly since it was released, and it's also opened up the doors to the likes of *BlazBlue*, a fighter we never could have imagined seeing a few short years ago.**

Capcom's magnificent brawler is now back with a vengeance, tightening up the few nigglesome issues that could be found in its first iteration, vastly improving the quality of online play and adding no less than ten new combatants, two of which are entirely new to the seminal series. Deejay and T-Hawk first appeared in *Super Street Fighter II*, Adon, Cody and Guy represent the *Alpha* series, while Dudley, Makoto and Ibuki first appeared in *Street Fighter III*.

As with the original pugilists, all eight fighters have been perfectly translated to the super-slick *Street Fighter IV* engine, effortlessly retaining the stylings that made them so popular in their original 2D outings. Adon, Cody and Dudley are easily our favourites, but there is enough variety in all eight newcomers to ensure that there's something here for everybody.

The main focus however will be on Juri and Hakan, and neither fighter disappoints. Juri is a master of Taekwondo, and has access to a range of truly devastating combos that can instantly rip apart an opponent. Our favourite, however, is the Turkish wrestler Hakan who can douse himself in oil to wriggle out of any hold, has a wonderful array of grapples and has access to two of the game's most stylish Ultras.

Add in new Ultras for each character, beautifully honed gameplay, the original car-smashing bonus round and a vastly improved online mode that enables you to battle up to eight players in a variety of different modes, and Capcom's new fighter is pretty much the perfect beat-'em-up. The real question is: where on Earth does the Japanese developer go from here?

### In a nutshell

**As with many games in the *Street Fighter* franchise, this is little more than a revision of what's come before it – hence the same score – what a revision though.**

### >> Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | 93% |
| Graphics | 98% |
| Sound | 95% |
| Playability | 99% |
| Addictivity | 96% |

**Overall 98%**

### WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE** (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
**TEKKEN 6** (XBOX 360)



### OPINION



Ten new characters, extra Ultras, refined gameplay and improved online play. Capcom has thought of everything, resulting in a staggering fighter that eclipses all competition, even *BlazBlue*. The low price point makes this even better value for money.

**Stuart Hunt**




» [PS3] Yes, he looks scary as hell, but Hakan is a fantastic addition to the series, playing like a cross between Blanka and Zangief.

Want to see Blazblue in action? Visit Darran's YouTube channel at **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJhNZUnkNck** for a gameplay video.

# BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger

## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FIGHTER YOU'LL EVER SEE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ZEN UNITED » **DEVELOPER:** ARC SYSTEMS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

PS3




»[PS3] Darran likes playing Tager because his moves just involve spinning the joystick like an idiot. That's how Darran plays beat-'em-ups.






**Arc System's *BlazBlue* has come out of nowhere to cement itself as one of the best new fighting franchises of recent times. Featuring a truly bizarre range of characters, it's a staggering achievement that features a solid combat system, liquid-smooth animation and a typically funky soundtrack.**

The visuals are a thing of beauty, with detailed sprites that, while not quite as well animated as the pugilists in *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, nevertheless look sensational. Diversity is also well catered for, with an eclectic range of 12 warriors, ranging from a Dante look-a-like with a gigantic blade to Taokaka, a bizarre cross between a cat and a human with a truly impressive range of combos. While the roster itself is small, it does mean that the characters themselves are beautifully balanced, with no one fighter getting the upper hand over the others.

For all its stunning visuals and brilliantly balanced characters, it's in its combat mechanics where *BlazBlue* really succeeds. Characters have access to weak, medium and strong attacks, as well as a unique 'Drive Attack'. Add in advanced attacks like a rapid cancel, counters and an instant block and *BlazBlue* proves itself to be an incredibly deep brawler. It can't deliver a killer blow to *Super Street Fighter IV*, but it remains a truly excellent fighter.

### OPINION



I never really got to play much of the Guilty Gear series, but if this is any indication of its style then I may have to hunt earlier games down. This is an amazingly fresh fighter with excellent fight mechanics and visuals that are to die for. Highly recommended.

**Stuart Hunt**

### >> Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | 75% |
| Graphics | 98% |
| Sound | 89% |
| Playability | 95% |
| Addictivity | 93% |

**Overall 94%**

# Samurai Shodown Sen

## SNK'S FENCER JUMPS THAT CURRENT-GEN FENCE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** SNK PLAYMORE »



**This is easily the best 3D iteration of SNK's flagship swordplay series to date, eclipsing the efforts on the N64 and, before then, SNK's very own Neo Geo CD format. But it's still very far from perfect.**

As you would expect from SNK, we couldn't find too much fault with the game's fighting mechanics. While initially it feels like there's a lot to take in, as fights seem to end quicker than they take to actually load (never a good mix), and nearly every button on the joypad is used to actuate some kind of slash or stab attack, once you accept that you must master the art of blocking, the game becomes quite rewarding, especially online, where, if you're lucky enough to find a human being to fight against, some pretty tense battles can take place.

As you can see quite clearly from these screenshots, where the game suffers is its lacklustre presentation, which doesn't hold a wax stick to the vivid visual gorgeousness of the Neo Geo games, and the staid aesthetics and robotic feel of the fights can sometimes make the game feel almost like a twilight-era PS2 game.

This latest *Shodown* episode is good in some aspects but a little lazy in others. When compared with the nigh-on flawlessness of *SSFIV*, there really is no contest where you should be spending your money this month.

### >> Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | 59% |
| Graphics | 58% |
| Sound | 60% |
| Playability | 78% |
| Addictivity | 70% |

**Overall 68%**

360




» [X360] This guy, Draco, is initially a bugger to defeat. The penultimate boss in the game, the knack is to stay close to him at all times,




### OPINION



I can't say I agree with Stuart at all on this. The visuals are horribly dull, the character game is disappointing, while most importantly, it just doesn't feel like a proper Samurai Shodown game. Give me striking 2D visuals and then I'll be interested. Sorry.

**Darran Jones**

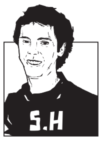
# RETRORATED

>> ESPGALUDA II

# Espgaluda II

## THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iPHONE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 (IMPORT) » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £5.49 » **PUBLISHER:** CAVE » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1




**There has been a raft of must-own iPhone titles of late that show the device as a serious and essential piece of gaming kit. Having only just picked our jaws from off the floor after playing *SF IV* last month, another fantastic title comes along that dislocates them again.**

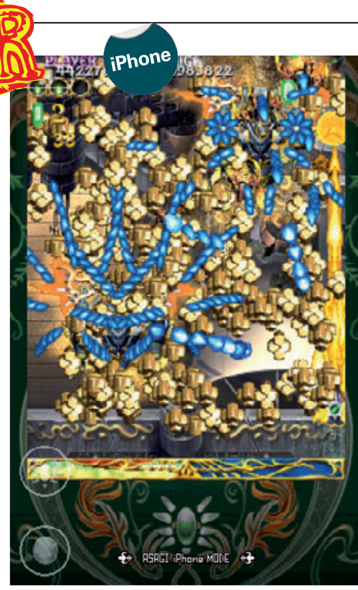
*Espgaluda II* is a manic vertical shooter from Cave that debuted in arcades, later received a port on the 360 in Japan, and has now received a resplendent iPhone conversion. The gimmick to *Espgaluda II* is that the game uses a variety of varying firing systems, the most notable of these being Awakening mode, which, when activated, slows enemy bullets and turns hostiles into gold and points bonuses. The key to gaining heady scores in the game comes from switching between the various fire systems, and using Awakening mode whenever the screen resembles the inside of a bag of M&M's.

The controls of this iPhone version are truly flawless, offering unmatched precision that goes a long way to improving the game. Moreover, the presentation and customisable play methods, which are split between two main game modes – arcade and iPhone, the latter of which allows you to tap at bullets and enemies in Awakening mode to chain combos together – make it easy for gamers of any skill set to pick up and play. We reckon those with even a passing interest in the genre will find it hard to not get sucked into its beauty. Fail to snap this up at your peril.

## >> Scores

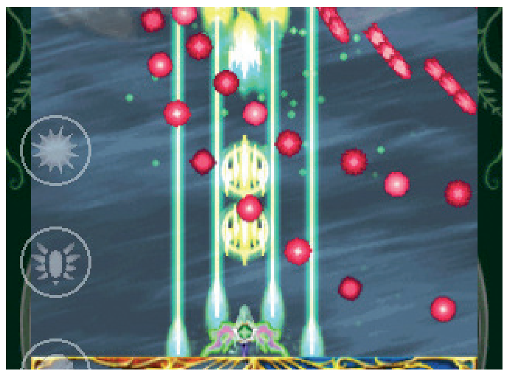
| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | 90% |
| Graphics | 90% |
| Sound | 75% |
| Playability | 90% |
| Addictivity | 90% |

**Overall 90%**






» [iPhone] Due to its intensity, *Espgaluda II* currently only works on the iPhone 3GS and latest iPod touch models.

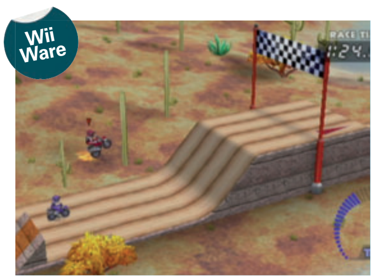


### OPINION




After losing myself in the excellent Xbox port, I'm astonished by how accurate this iPhone conversion is. In fact, I might go so far as to say it's actually better, as it's a fraction of the price and controls far better. A stunning achievement and a must-own shooter.

**Darran Jones**




## Excitebike World Rally

» **SYSTEM:** WiiWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

**>> While we would** have loved a new version of *Excitebike*, this update is still great fun. Highly polished thanks to tight controls and a superb level-editing system, it's only really let down by a lack of variety and the inability to play with friends – interestingly, you can play online multiplayer games. Great fun, but lacking in longevity.

>> Score **79%**

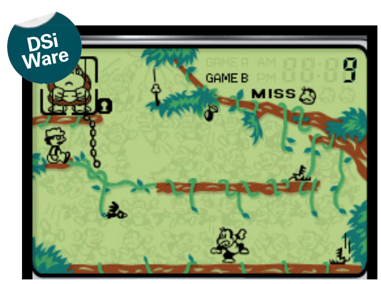
## Pinball Heroes

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2




**>> Available separately or** as a cheaper overall package, *Pinball Heroes* is a selection of tables based on popular PS3 games. Sadly, while the presentation is pretty decent, the tables themselves lack variety and just don't offer long-term appeal. Dull and uninspired table design mean that you're only going to get a real kick out of this if you're a fan of the game it's based on. Pity.

>> Score **58%**




## Game & Watch Donkey Kong Jr

» **SYSTEM:** DSiWARE
» **PRICE:** 200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

**>> After what seems** like forever, Nintendo has finally started releasing its old Game & Watch titles on the DSi. Our favourite so far is easily *Donkey Kong Jr*, and it's still amazingly addictive to play. It's perfectly emulated, and the only thing that lets it down is that there's no way of challenging other DSi owners with your best score.

>> Score **86%**




## Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight

» **SYSTEM:** PC
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-10

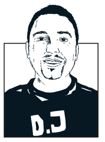
**>> Considering that this** is allegedly the last in the *C&C* series, it's a pity that it hasn't gone out on a high. Dispensing with everything that has made the series such a joy to play – even the hammy cut-scenes have gone all serious – this is a step away from the norm. Unfortunately, it's a step too far as the new mechanics are disappointing.

>> Score **52%**

# Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

## CLIMAX TAKES KONAMI'S SHOCKER BACK TO ITS ROOTS

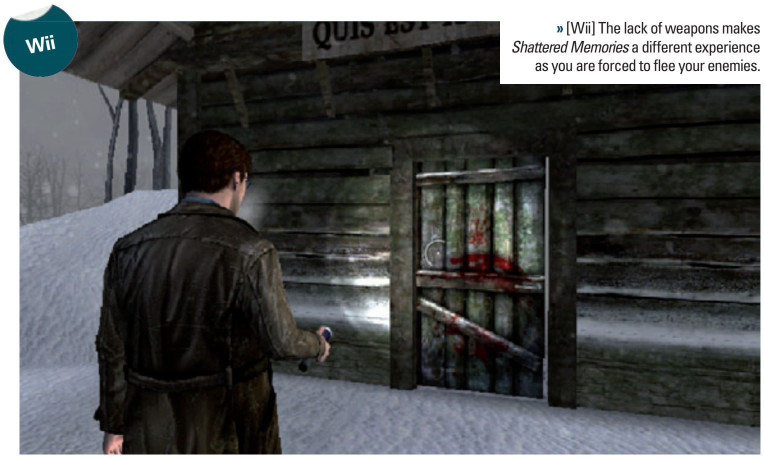
» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSP, PS2 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** CLIMAX » **PLAYERS:** 1



**Let's face it: the last few *Silent Hill* games have been disappointing. With the original team all but disbanded, it's been down to Western developers to hold it together, and if we're honest the results have been rather lacking.**

After cutting its teeth on *Silent Hill: Origins*, Portsmouth-based Climax has thrown the traditional *Silent Hill* rulebook out the window and in doing so has not only created the best game in the series since *Silent Hill 2*, but has also rewritten the survival-horror genre.

*Shattered Memories* makes your skin crawl. It features the same sort of adult themes that worked so well in the classic *Silent Hill 2*, and it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Wii can be much more than just a machine for kids and grannies.



» [Wii] The lack of weapons makes *Shattered Memories* a different experience as you are forced to flee your enemies.

### OPINION



After being largely unimpressed with *Silent Hill: Homecoming*, it's refreshing to find a game in the series that's genuinely bone-chilling. It may rely on gimmicks from other games, but when it comes to scary, this has every other Wii game beaten.

**Stuart Hunt**




While it's loosely based on the original game, *Shattered Memories* is more a reboot, and skilfully utilises the Wii Remote to genuinely add to the immersive environments. Yes, the puzzles have all been seen before, and it features plenty of clichés, but *Shattered Memories* still has its own unique voice that demands to be heard.

No weapons sounds like a cop-out, but when you witness your first chase scene and the heart-pounding adrenaline rush that accompanies it, you'll quickly realise that Climax made the right choice. It still feels rather clunky and old-fashioned at times, but that's the worst that can be said.

### >> Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | 70% |
| Graphics | 84% |
| Sound | 88% |
| Playability | 88% |
| Addictivity | 85% |
| **Overall** | **87%** |




## Aqua Panic!

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

**>> *Aqua Panic!* is** an interesting take on *Lemmings*, where you have to save a cascading stream of water and fish by directing them to a safe area at the bottom of the screen. While the concept itself is sound, fiddly controls do hold it back somewhat. Some extremely frustrating difficulty spikes and a surprisingly high price tag further hamper it, making it a tough game to wholeheartedly recommend.

>> Score **67%**

## Burning Bubbles Lab

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE
» **PRICE:** FREE » **PLAYERS:** 1



**>> While a free** version of *Bust-A-Move* sounds fantastic, the reality is a different thing entirely. *Burning Bubbles Lab* lacks the charm of Taito's popular franchise, and has more poorly designed levels and some horrendously sluggish controls that make aiming at bubbles an absolute nightmare. It may be free at the moment, but we'll be very surprised if you find yourself returning to it.

>> Score **38%**



## Sonic The Hedgehog 2

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE
» **PRICE:** £3.49 » **PLAYERS:** 1

**>> While we desperately** wait for *Sonic 4*, we've been passing the time with Sega's latest iPhone app. While this features better emulation than seen on the first *Sonic* iPhone game, it's still not up to the standard we were hoping for. It's also missing the multiplayer mode, although a patch is on the way. Fun, but it's still let down by the actual device.

>> Score **68%**



## Bounce & Break

» **SYSTEM:** DSiWARE
» **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

**>> Does the world** really need another *Arkanoid* clone? Enjoy Gaming obviously thinks so as its latest release is just that, albeit with a distinctively Zen-like tone. While the power-ups and level layouts are pretty average, the online leaderboards keep you going back for one more go, while the Classical and Orientation game modes offer a fair amount of variety. Not earth-shattering, but fun nonetheless.

>> Score **69%**

>> 3D DOT GAME HEROES




## ★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind 3D Dot Game Heroes

>> Characters we've created in the sprite editor include Dizzy, Miner Willy and, of course, Link

>> Hit a monster on the head with a book for long enough and it will eventually appear in your encyclopaedia

## ★ WHY NOT TRY

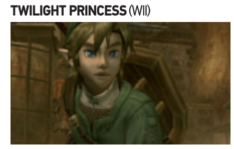
▼ SOMETHING OLD

**THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST** (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

**THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS** (WII)

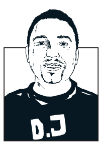




» [PS3] Dizzy lives on in a brand new adventure. This took us all of 20 minutes to create.

THE LEGO OF ZELDA

# 3D Dot Game Heroes



**We've had our eye on *3D Dot Game Heroes* for some time now. With its kitsch pixel styling and old-school gameplay sensibilities, it's easily one of the most unique retail games we've played for some time.**

Oh, and worry not, for while *3D Dot Game Heroes* is not related to a traditional gaming franchise, this is nothing more than a very polished *Legend Of Zelda* clone. In fact, if we're completely honest, aside from the stylish graphical presentation, we're surprised that its developers haven't had a call from the big N, as it's nigh-on identical. Enemies are virtually no different, chests hide boomerangs, the health apples look like *Zelda*'s hearts, the bosses are extremely similar, often requiring the same tactics to defeat them… The list of similarities just goes on and on.

And yet, while *3D Dot Game Heroes* manages to successfully ape Nintendo's classic franchise, there is a certain malaise that hangs in the air whenever you play it. It tries so hard to mimic the hallowed franchise that it adds very few of its own ideas. You can change the length and width of your sword over time – it's also affected by your health – but it's simply not enough to hold your interest.

One thing we do like, however, is the excellent character creation mode, which is highly flexible and is only really limited by your imagination. These flashes of brilliance are few and far between, though, and the end result is that for all its on-screen gorgeousness, *3D Dot Game Heroes* is very dull to play. It follows the *Zelda* template so slavishly that there's very few of its own ideas in there. The end result is that it has a reeking air of familiarity to it, but none of the actual Nintendo magic to back it up. It's *The Legend Of Zelda* but with all of the personality stripped out of it. This in itself is a real pity, as there are plenty of neat little in-jokes – especially if you're a fan of JRPGs and From Software's own *Demon's Souls* – but it simply isn't enough to make up for its shortcomings.

Those with no access to a current Nintendo console will find *3D Dot Game Heroes* to be a pleasant diversion from the usual racers and first-person shooters that are available, but anyone with a Wii should simply stick with the real deal.

### INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99
» **PUBLISHER:** SOUTHPEAK GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** SILICON STUDIO
» **PLAYERS:** 1

### BRIEF HISTORY

» Silicon Studio initially made its name creating middleware software for other companies. Its first game was *Onore no Shinzuru Michi wo Yuke* for the PSP, a puzzler that allowed you to control multiple ninjas. It hasn't confirmed if there will be a sequel to *3D Dot Game Heroes* yet.

### OPINION



I was left a little disappointed by this. I loved the art style and was confident that Silicon Studio and From Software would create something great. Sadly, as Darran points out, *3D Dot Game Heroes* is just a *Zelda* clone. The game is sorely lacking any kind of charisma.

**Stuart Hunt**

## In a nutshell

**Get past the exquisite-looking visuals and you'll discover *3D Dot Game Heroes* to be a rather dull experience, full of clichés and uninspiring level design. It's fun, but not as fun as we were expecting.**

## >> Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| Presentation | **75%** |
| Graphics | **92%** |
| Sound | **78%** |
| Playability | **68%** |
| Addictivity | **60%** |

**Overall 67%**




**The days are growing longer as summer approaches and that signifies two things. First, the amount of homebrew being released will start to thin out as the developers start heading out into the 'real world' in order to do that socialising thingy. Secondly, today's glorious sunshine means that the heavens are going to be ripped asunder tomorrow and I'll get thoroughly soaked going to the supermarket. I don't like summer much…**

# DEAD ON TIME

Retro Gamer Sizzler

## FIVE MINUTES TO SAVE THE WORLD

**Paul Kooistra seems to have embarked on a one-man mission to extend the Amstrad CPC's library of good shoot-'em-up games. It's already impossible to discuss the genre for Sir Alan's machines without mentioning Kooistra's previous outing *Star Sabre* – which scored a very respectable 88% so very long ago in issue 51 and has since been given a 128K makeover that would comfortably push that score into Sizzler territory – and now he's back from outer space with some 64K blasting and an interesting take on arena-based action.**

*Dead On Time* is something unusual for home computer shoot-'em-ups because it's time-based: the game doesn't furnish the player lives, continues or even a shield to protect their spaceship. Instead everything is tied directly to the in-game timer, so when the player runs out of seconds, the game is over. In arcade mode a rather stingy-sounding 30 seconds are added to the clock, and collecting pods left by despatched red, green or blue enemies will add a couple of precious extra seconds to that time, while collisions will reduce it. More importantly, when three pods of the same colour are collected, they'll power up the ship's bullet field, which surrounds it in a haze of energy that can absorb enemy bullets with a matching colour to add more time and bump up the score multiplier.

In the score challenge mode things play slightly differently. A much meatier five minutes are added to the clock, and that's a fixed limit; time lost or gained through collisions or pod collection instead applies to the duration of the bullet field, and the player has to rack up as big a score as possible in those precious 300 seconds.

Considering that this is an 8-bit shoot-'em-up, the scoring system really is involved, and while it can initially be ignored as new players acclimatise themselves to the multi-directional firing controls – moving the joystick alone aims the ship in one of eight compass points, while holding the button down locks off rotation and fires in that direction – understanding how the bullet field and multiplier work are absolutely crucial for getting scores that look like international telephone numbers with the dialling code.

The presentation is pretty much spot-on, with good-looking green-on-green information screens for instructions and the high-score tables for the two modes. The in-game graphics shift around very smoothly, and distinguishing the different colours isn't an issue – although this is one game that owners of green screen monitors probably won't be able to enjoy fully – and the sound is a top-notch mixture of appropriately uptempo music and spot effects. A time-based shooter is a pretty bold design choice generally, because the action has to be busy enough to maintain a constant pace, and that can make balancing the difficulty an issue. In *Dead On Time*'s case, it's pretty challenging and will need skill to get exceptional scores, but most players should at least enjoy the shooty goodness.

**93%**




**FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC
**DEVELOPED BY:** PAUL KOOISTRA
**LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/DEAD-ON-TIME
**RELEASE DATE:** 2010
**PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD OR £5.99 (CASSETTE)
**REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK




» [Amstrad CPC] Options, options… what to choose?



» [Amstrad CPC] Nothing green to be shot at with!




» [Amstrad CPC] Alien barrels of fun.




» [Amstrad CPC] I'm blue da ba dee…




» [Amstrad CPC] Oh no, space snake!

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
**retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

## BERZERK MMX

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** ROBERT HURST
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BERZERK-MMX » **PRICE:** FREE

**Despite having some** fantastic clones of classic coin-operated games, the VIC-20 has a remarkably small list of straight arcade conversions to its name, so a version of something loud and shooty like *Berzerk* was almost guaranteed to be popular here at **Retro Gamer**. And since the developer is Robert Hurst, the man behind the excellent unexpanded *Pac-Man* clone *Quikman 2008*, we were pretty eager to get our hands on *Berzerk MMX*.

The VIC graphics are, unsurprisingly, chunkier than the original version's but serve their purpose well, in-game sound effects are simple but again appropriate, and the action rapidly becomes frantic as the poor player-controlled humanoid fights for his life. And while *Berzerk MMX* runs on an 8K expanded VIC-20, for users blessed with a 16K expansion there's a second version, which ships with most of the speech from the original in place and goes even further towards replicating the arcade experience.

**87%**






» [VIC-20] A bullet for me? You shouldn't have!

## UWOL: QUEST FOR MONEY

Retro Gamer Sizzler

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

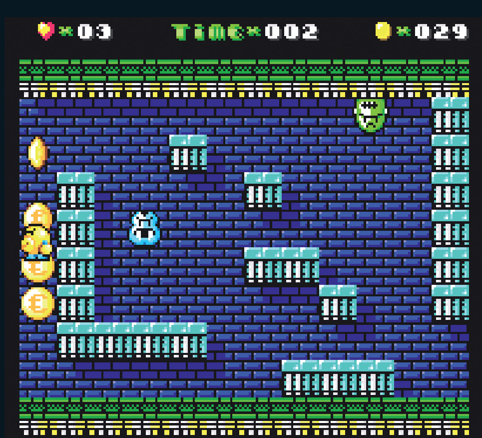
» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** SHIRU
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/Y3N2NK7 » **PRICE:** FREE

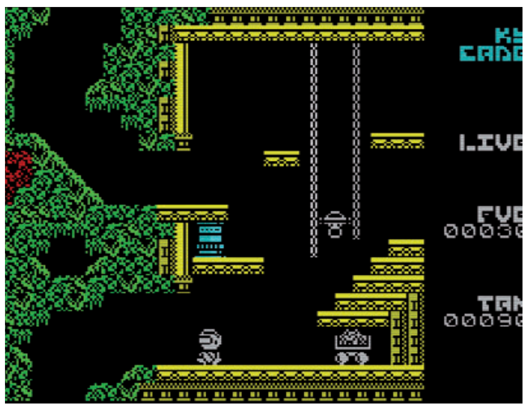
**After the Spectrum-based** outing that we enjoyed rather a lot back in issue 75, loveable if morally dubious cartoon blob Uwol has regenerated into a Mega Drive sprite and returned to take a second stab at the treasure rooms and security systems of the Storm Palace. That means more running into a room, collecting of coins, avoiding the disembodied heads of the security patrols, and trying to get out again before the timer runs out and a scary ghoulie is despatched to give chase.

The original Spectrum game received a warm welcome when we looked at it because it was playable and well-presented; fortunately, none of those elements have been lost during conversion. In fact, with all the extra colour being flung about the place it's now easier to distinguish the enemies from the background than previously. *Uwol* feels at home in a 16-bit world, and although the adventure might not be as sprawling as other Mega Drive titles, it's a respectable release for the machine.

**91%**

» [Mega Drive] Dirty cash. I want you.



» [Spectrum] Stewie Griffin in a space suit!

## KYD CADET

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM 48K » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL JENKINSON
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/KYD-CADET » **PRICE:** FREE



**Poor Kyd Cadet,** sent out by Space Command on his very first mission and he's forgotten to refuel before leaving base – it's not like there are interplanetary petrol stations out there. Still, a nearby mining colony offers a chance to fill 'er up, but the scanners don't show any people – just the mining machinery, still running and potentially lethal. But there's no choice: Kyd's going to have to land, grab the fuel he needs and get away safely.

This first outing for developer Paul Jenkinson was created with Jonathan Cauldwell's Arcade Game Designer. It's no-nonsense platforming action and, although there are a couple of little quirks such as the way Kyd is respawned after death – he can accidentally end up 'teleported' to a different part of the map – the overall design and layout of the screens have been very well constructed, and the graphics are beautifully detailed. It's a little short and all but silent, but hopefully this is a taste of what Jenkinson will come up with next.

**84%**

## WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [MSX] I say! Steady on, old chap!

### >> Competition is good

The MSXdev competition for 2010 has been announced and, since the previous iterations have brought us some great releases like *Retalliot*, *Danger Tower* or *British Bob*, hopefully that means there will be something good developed this year as well. The competition runs until the end of January 2011 and entries are added to the website at **msxdev.msxblue.com** as they're released. An archive of the games from previous years is also available.




» [Spectrum] Doing something constructive.

### >> Doing it yourself

Jonathan Cauldwell has updated his already excellent Arcade Game Designer 2 – it was released at the end of 2009, but we missed it in the flurry of Spectrum releases – and, along with a couple of bug fixes and optimisations, it comes with support for the recent ULAplus hardware, which allows for lots of extra pretty colours in Spectrum games. If this sounds like fun, it can be grabbed at **kikstart.eu/agd2.4**.




» [Atari 8-bit] Doing something destructive!

### >> Kill, maim, destroy!

It's been a while in coming, but Karolj Nadj's Atari 8-bit port of Jeff Minter's original VIC-20 version of *Gridrunner* – widely held to be the best 8-bit version of the game – is painfully close to completion now and it'll probably have been released before this item goes to press. From the previews we've already seen, it plays beautifully and we're looking forward to giving it a proper blast soon.

# HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

## WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

### >> A grand day out

Those busy Ovine Design bunnies have been building their own arcade. No, not a full-size one, but a virtual arcade, stocked with cabinets to play, one-armed bandits and pinball machines. A little bit like *Namco Museum*, really… and something released recently by Microsoft, apparently?

It's only at the design stage right now, but Smila has posted some work-in-progress images of the furniture. The pinball machines are going to be set dressing, but a couple of posters over at Retro Remakes asked for the slots to be playable and it's being considered.

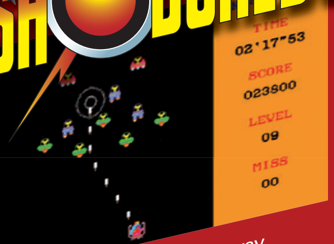


» [PC] Anybody got a spare 20p?

### >> I've got to make it show

To go with the review of *'Troid* elsewhere on this very page, we'll give one-man team Hermit Games another quick mention since he's recently converted his critically acclaimed Xbox 360 shoot-'em-up *Leave Home* to the PC. For those who haven't heard of it, the levels are generated randomly based on the player's performance, so every game will play differently. It's less than four quid and available from **www.hermitgames.com**.

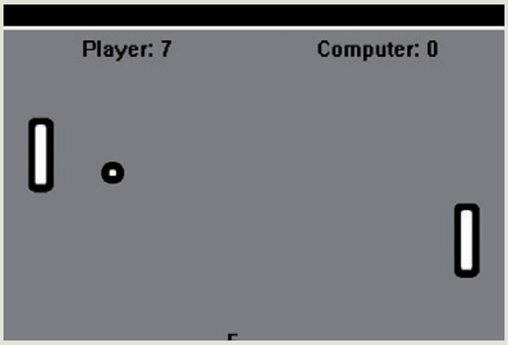
## FLASH BOREDOM




Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer's** Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Nyahax '93.***

RETRO-THEMED FLASH shoot-'em-ups aren't exactly rare, but *Nyahax '93* has a cunning plan: it doesn't have lives, but if the in-game timer reaches zero the game ends. Levels must be completed as quickly as possible and time bonuses diligently collected from the bonus stages to keep playing. **kikstart.eu/nyahax**

## REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



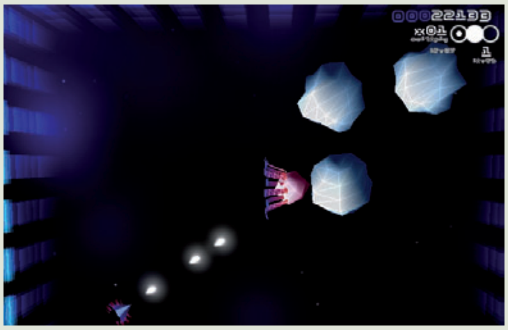

## PONG PLUS



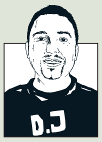
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PONG-PLUS

**The issue with** *Pong Plus* is that there's nothing in there that really qualifies as a plus. It offers a computer-controlled player, but it's easy to thrash even on the hardest difficulty, and the 'catch ray' system, which stops the ball moving vertically and sends it back to the player, is pretty much useless, so the only positive tweak is the in-game timer that at least gives it a little pace.

It really doesn't help that the bat collisions will sometimes accidentally knock the ball backwards out of court or that it sometimes hiccups and returns a shot despite the AI player being far enough away to be in another time zone. *Pong* is a difficult game to clone or enhance, as this sadly demonstrates.



## 'TROID



» **DOWNLOAD:** HERMITGAMES.COM/GAMES/TROID.HTML

***'Triod* is a** variant on arena shoot-'em-ups and in particular the classic *Asteroids*, so the action takes place in a walled-off area of space and the objects are built from geometric shapes with ethereal lighting effects.

Along with the fire button, there are two keys for clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation and a third for the thrusters, and while using thrust-based controls to manoeuvre around bullets isn't intuitive, it'll certainly get the adrenaline pumping. The scoring system is equally uncomplicated but effective – destroying three rocks of the same size in a row bumps the score multiplier up – so the challenge of finding good strategies to maximise scoring for each stage is therefore where *'Troid*'s long-term replay value comes from.




Remake of the Month




## DIGITAL: A LOVE STORY



» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.SCOUTSHONOUR.COM/DIGITAL/

**Before the internet** joined computer users together globally there were bulletin boards: home computers with large disk drives that were connected to a telephone line or two to allow remote users to connect to them and transfer files or send messages to other users. Christine Love's *Digital: A Love Story* is set in 1988 and opens with the player being handed the keys of a brand new Amie computer – which is more than a little reminiscent of a certain Commodore machine – that arrived from the computer store with a modem installed and a message from the nice chap with the number of a decent local board to call.

Generally speaking, the simulation aspect isn't particularly accurate, and the game's user interface is a partial simulation of Workbench 1.3 and can be a little clunky, since windows can't be dragged around and their priorities don't change, which forces the user to open and close programs more than would otherwise be necessary. But interface issues aside, where *Digital* really shines is the story. It might not be as interactive as it possibly could be but has been well constructed and becomes surprisingly immersive as it pans out, offering twists and turns along the way and some good, solid yanks at the heart strings, which only the most cynical players won't at least respond to. The colourful language may put some players off, however.

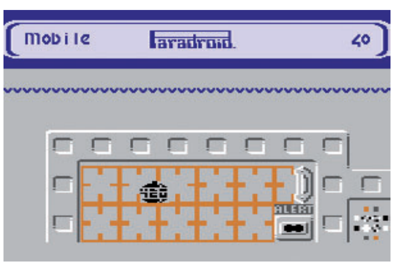


# HOMEBREW HEROES

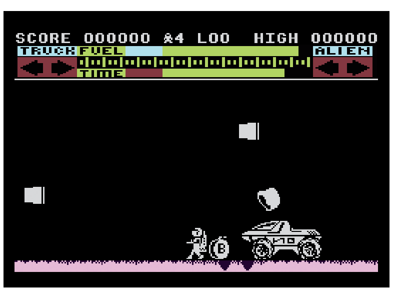
**PETE DABBS** HAS BEEN WRITING GAMES FOR QUITE A WHILE, STARTING WITH THE 8-BITS AND MEANDERING INTO THE 16-BIT MACHINES AND ONWARDS. BUT NOW HE'S FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING AT PROGRAMMING FOR 8-BIT MACHINES AGAIN, SO WE WANTED TO TALK TO HIM



» [Atari 8-bit] Early C64 graphics conversion tests.




» [Atari 8-bit] Re-imagining *Paradroid* for the Atari.




» [Atari 8-bit] The BBC version of *Lunar Jetman*, ported!

## HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Pete can't live without

**1 Space: 1999 (Oric)** Isometric – one of my favourite display modes – on a machine that's barely heard of and *Space: 1999*. Need I say more?

**2 Knight And Grail (C64)** Nice, polished, good-looking game and something fairly different for the C64.

**3 Sgt Helmet Zero (various)** Great platformer that reminds me of *Bionic Commando*. The Mojon Twins seem quite prolific and their stuff always looks pretty good.

**4 Dead On Time (CPC)** Something different to the usual attempts at horizontal scrolling and works really well because of it. Graphics, music and gameplay are all top notch.

**5 Retaliot (MSX)** Impressive, high-res, colourful, parallax, old-school shoot-'em-up action. Just a few terms that apply to this great-looking MSX game.

## Q&A

**Retro Gamer: What got you into programming games?**

**Pete Dabbs:** I started out like most other people, playing games. Then I got interested in programming but didn't go straight into games. To begin with I was just writing demos and uploading them to Compunet under the pseudonym JCB. There were three of us known collectively as The Meanteam, a name we borrowed from *2000 AD*. Ste Day, our artist, got a call from a local software company who were looking for an artist, he said he knew a coder looking for work, and the boss said, 'Okay, bring him along.' That was how I got my first real coding job, around 1987.

**RG: What prompted you to return to your roots as a backroom coder?**

**PD:** I think it's been a confluence of events. Due to a family situation I've now found myself without much work due to having to basically take a year off, so plenty of spare time, boredom with most modern games and a nostalgic need to get back to my roots. It's helped having Ste around to do some graphics for me. Ste's always been one of the more code-knowledgeable artists I've known, where you can explain why something has to be done in a certain way and he'll work to that and produce something that you can actually use.

**RG: How do those two eras compare?**

**PD:** Everything seemed smaller scale back then. As a company, Esprit Software Programs had just three people working there: me; the boss, Lance; and another coder, Paul. Ste did some graphics freelance for us. These days games need an entire army to produce. As far as development goes, there are relatively super-fast PCs these days to develop with. No more waiting an hour for your source to compile.

**RG: You're slaving away at several projects. Is it difficult to manage so many ideas at once?**

**PD:** I prefer to have a few things on the go because this is just a hobby and it doesn't really matter when things get finished and I have a tendency to get bored. I tend to go crazy for a couple of days on one thing then lose momentum for whatever reason, so I just move over to something else, and surprisingly I can remember the intricacies of multiple projects at once. Shame my long-term memory isn't that good.

**RG: And what can we look forward to seeing in the near future from you?**

**PD:** I've been working on a kind of jacket code for porting BBC Micro games to the Atari 800. I'm also taking on some C64 to Atari ports, which is a much bigger task: *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, *Paradroid*, *Delta* and a couple of others. Instead of trying to run the native code, I'm writing everything from scratch, as some of them need too much RAM as is and rely on the better sprite hardware on the C64, so a fair bit of stuff needs to be re-factored.

**RG: Of the games you've worked on, which is the one you're most proud of?**

**PD:** Most of the professional jobs I've had are things like optimising code or trying to cram games onto machines they shouldn't really run on. For example, I had the dubious pleasure of working on *Rise Of The Robots*. I came to it near the end of development to do the CD-i port, and if you know anything about CD-i development you'll know that getting that game and its massive sprites together with the poorly designed systems on that machine was thought pretty much impossible. Then I became a producer, which I thought I'd enjoy, but I missed coding.

**RG: And is there anything you want to try but haven't found time for so far?**

**PD:** I'd love to do some code for machines I either never worked on before or skimmed over, like the BBC. I learned to code on that machine, had my first encounter with assembly code, which I forgot most of until I got a C64.

**RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?**

**PD:** Go for it! There are so many resources available these days, development tools for every possible environment and target machine, documents and knowledgeable people to pilfer information from. It also seems to be getting more popular at the moment, so it's a good time to start.

# BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

**You've been asking** for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, we've been looking at the best of the Master System.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



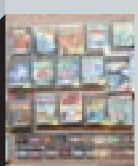
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



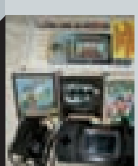
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

## eBAY BARGAINS

**Darran's been on the lookout for ready-made Lynx collections and found some bargains… and some not so cheap**



■ If you have plenty of cash to spare and want to get into Atari's Lynx then why not go for this? It features both versions of the machine, 44 games – ten of them are still sealed – and is in great condition. £200 is a lot, but this is still not bad for an instant collection.



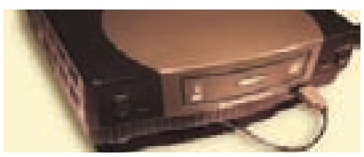
■ At the other end of the scale was this offering. You get an Atari Lynx Mark II, three games including *Chips Challenge* and *Awesome Golf*, and a power supply unit. And the cost of all this? A princely £85. No wonder it's still on sale…



■ Darran's latest obsession is collecting the pin badges that used to come with some Atari Lynx games. He's been slowly picking them up every now and then but hit the mother lode recently with this cracking selection. A bargain at just under a tenner.

### 3DO

| | |
|---|---|
| 3DO GOLDSTAR | £45+ ($81+) |
| PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER) | £40+ ($74+) |
| PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER) | £20+ ($37+) |



### ACORN

| | |
|---|---|
| ARCHIMEDES | £30 ($55) |
| ATOM | £50 ($92) |
| ELECTRON | £10 ($18) |
| BBC MICRO | £15 ($28) |



### AMSTRAD

| | |
|---|---|
| CPC 464 | £10+ ($18+) |
| CPC 664 | £90+ ($165+) |
| CPC 6128 | £25+ ($46+) |
| GX4000 | £50+ ($92+) |

### APPLE

| | |
|---|---|
| APPLE II | £30+ ($55+) |

### ATARI

| | |
|---|---|
| 400/800/600XL/XE | £20+ ($37+) |
| 2600 (VCS) | £20+ ($37+) |
| 5200 | £30 ($55) |
| 7800 | £20+ ($37+) |
| JAGUAR | £20+ ($37+) |
| JAGUAR CD | £70 ($129) |
| LYNX I/II | £20+ ($37+) |
| ST | £20+ ($37+) |

### BANDAI



| | |
|---|---|
| GUNDAM RX-78 | £75+ ($138+) |
| PLAYDIA | £90 ($166) |
| PIPPIN (ATMARK) | £500+ ($921+) |
| WONDERSWAN | £10 ($18) |
| WONDERSWAN COLOR | £20 ($37) |
| WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL | £25 ($46) |

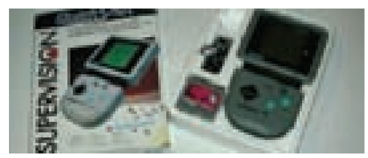
### COMMODORE

| | |
|---|---|
| AMIGA 500/600/1200 | £20+ ($37+) |
| C16/PLUS/4 | £15+ ($28+) |
| C64 | £10+ ($18+) |
| C64 GS | £30+ ($55+) |
| C128 | £30+ ($55+) |
| CDTV | £20 ($37) |
| CD32 | £25 ($46) |
| VIC-20 | £10+ ($18+) |

### FUJITSU

| | |
|---|---|
| FUJITSU FM | £100+ ($184+) |






| | |
|---|---|
| FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY | £200+ ($368+) |

### MISCELLANEOUS

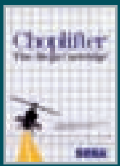
| | |
|---|---|
| BALLY ASTROCADE | £20 ($37) |
| BARCODE BATTLER | £5 ($18) |
| CASIO LOOPY | £25 ($46) |
| FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F | £10 ($18) |
| COLECOVISION | £30 ($55) |
| DRAGON 32/64 | £8 ($15) |
| ARCADIA 2001 | £10 ($18) |
| EPOCH CASSETTE VISION | £20 ($37) |
| EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION | £30 ($55) |
| INTELLIVISION | £40+ ($74+) |
| ODYSSEY | £10 ($18) |
| ORIC-1 | £20 ($37) |
| PLAYSTATION | £10 ($18) |
| SAM COUPÉ | £50-£200 ($92-$368) |
| SUPERVISION | £15 ($28) |
| TIGER ELEC GAME.COM | £15 ($28) |
| TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2) | £10 ($18) |
| VECTREX (MB/GCE) | £80 ($147) |
| X68000 | £90+ ($166+) |

### MSX

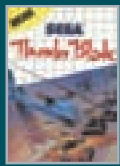
| | |
|---|---|
| MSX 1 | £10+ ($18+) |
| MSX 2 | £20+ ($37+) |
| MSX 2+ | £30+ ($55+) |
| MSX TURBO R | £30+ ($55+) |

# RETRO AUCTION WATCH

**Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest that have caught our eyes. This month we've been examining Master System arcade ports**



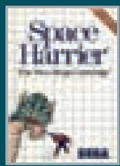
CHOPLIFTER
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£21**



THUNDERBLADE
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£6**
Ended at **£12.01**



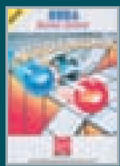
OUT RUN
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No sale**



SPACE HARRIER
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **No sale**



SHINOBI
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.67**



MARBLE MADNESS
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£24.84**

## NEC

| | |
|---|---|
| PC-6601 | **£10+ ($18+)** |
| PC-8801 | **£20 ($37)** |
| PC-9801 | **£35 ($65)** |
| PC-FX | **£50 ($92)** |
| PC-ENGINE | **£55 ($101)** |
| PC-ENGINE GT | **£70+ ($129+)** |
| TURBOGRAFX-16 | **£30 ($55)** |
| TURBO EXPRESS | **£50 ($92)** |
| SUPERGRAFX | **£80 ($147)** |
| PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD | **£50+ ($92+)** |
| PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO | **£120 ($221)** |
| DUO-R | **£80 ($147)** |

## NINTENDO



| | |
|---|---|
| FAMICOM | **£60 ($111)** |
| FAMICOM AV | **£40 ($74)** |
| FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM | **£70 ($129)** |
| SHARP FAMICOM TWIN | **£100 ($184)** |
| GAME & WATCH | **£1+ ($2+)** |
| GAME BOY B/W | **£5 ($9)** |
| GAME BOY POCKET | **£8 ($15)** |
| GAME BOY COLOR | **£12 ($22)** |
| GAME BOY ADVANCE | **£25 ($46)** |
| N64 | **£10 ($18)** |
| N64 DD | **£150+ ($276+)** |
| NES (TOASTER) | **£15 ($28)** |
| NES (DOG BONE) | **£50 ($92)** |
| SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN) | **£20 ($37)** |
| SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN) | **£50+ ($92+)** |
| VIRTUAL BOY | **£80 ($147)** |

## PHILIPS

| | |
|---|---|
| CD-I | **£20+ ($37+)** |
| CD-I 450/500 | **£30 ($55)** |
| VIDEOPAC G7000 | **£10 ($18)** |
| VIDEOPAC G7400 | **£20 ($37)** |



## SEGA

| | |
|---|---|
| 32X | **£35 ($65)** |
| DREAMCAST | **£25 ($46)** |
| GAME GEAR | **£15 ($28)** |
| SG-1000 | **£50-£150 ($80-$260)** |
| SC-3000 | **£50 ($92)** |
| MASTER SYSTEM I/II | **£10 ($18)** |
| AMSTRAD MEGA PC | **£10 ($18)** |
| TERADRIVE | **£100 ($184)** |
| MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS | **£25 ($46)** |
| GENESIS 3 | **£35 ($65)** |
| NOMAD | **£100 ($184)** |
| MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE | **£100+ ($184+)** |
| MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II | **£50+ ($92+)** |
| PICO | **£20 ($37)** |
| SATURN | **£30 ($55)** |

## SINCLAIR

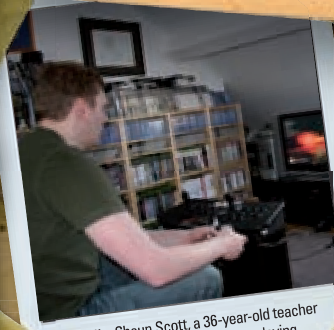
| | |
|---|---|
| ZX80 | **£200 ($368)** |
| ZX81 | **£70 ($129)** |
| ZX SPECTRUM 48K | **£10 ($18)** |
| ZX SPECTRUM 128K | **£40 ($74)** |
| ZX SPECTRUM+ | **£35 ($65)** |
| ZX SPECTRUM +2 | **£35 ($65)** |
| ZX SPECTRUM +3 | **£40 ($74)** |

## SNK

| | |
|---|---|
| NEO-GEO AES | **£150+ ($276+)** |
| NEO-GEO MVS | **£70 ($129)** |
| NEO-GEO CD | **£100 ($184)** |
| NEO-GEO CDZ | **£80+ ($147+)** |
| NEO-GEO POCKET | **£20 ($37)** |
| NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR | **£35 ($65)** |

# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

**THIS MONTH SHEFFIELD SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER AND RETRO REWIND ORGANISER SHAUN SCOTT TAKES US THROUGH HIS RETRO COLLECTION**



» "Hi! I'm Shaun Scott, a 36-year-old teacher from Sheffield. When I'm not playing *Rez* I'm organising Retro Rewind."



» "Here's a selection of my handhelds including the Neo Geo Pocket, Atari Lynx and Game Gear. I've recently been playing the awesome *Xybots* on the Lynx."



» "Some lesser-played consoles, though I recently started playing the Jaguar again, which has the odd decent game such as *Tempest 2000*."



» "Me and the nephew on two-player mode. Great game. I still put 20p coins in it and use it as a piggy bank. My wife Gerry bought this for me for my birthday!"



» "Close-up of DC games. My favourites include *Soul Calibur*, *Giga Wing*, *MSR*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Power Stone*."



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY…** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



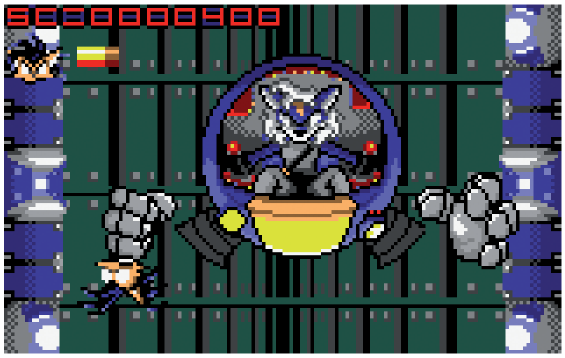
» We love Eugene and his games, so we'll never miss an opportunity to feature him in the magazine.

## EUGENIOUS!

Greetings from the States,
I love the mag and really hope you keep up the great work. It's the only print magazine I bother subscribing to, even at the high overseas rates! It's so full of content that I keep getting further and further behind in my reading because I can't keep up. But hey, it's a magazine about retro games; it's all years out of date anyway, so what harm will a few extra months do?

Anyway, the real reason I'm writing in is because I thought you might enjoy some pictures and a quick story. I recently attended the Midwest Gaming Classic outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and one of the featured speakers was Eugene Jarvis of *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* fame. After he finished his talk, I spoke to him briefly and got him to sign a couple back issues of **Retro Gamer**. When I handed him the mags (opened to the Making Of articles for *Defender* and *Robotron*), his first reaction was, "Wow, these are some nice spreads!" So, I guess you can count the creator of two of the best arcade games ever as one of your fans!

Oh, and I also had a chance to ask him what he thinks of all the twin-stick shooters that are coming out these days. He said it's great, and that he loves the basic mechanic and thinks that something about it just feels right. I completely agree with him!
Enjoy! Tim Herr via email



» [Atari Lynx] Were we wrong to give *Zaku* so little space? Head on over to the forum to give your answer.

**Darran is extremely jealous of you. Although he's been in correspondence with Eugene for quite a few years now, he's never had the opportunity to meet him face to face. Eugene was a huge inspiration to the arcade scene, and it's great to see that he's still happy to discuss his work. Maybe we should try and get his Xbox 360 Gamertag and challenge him to a game of *Geometry Wars*…**

## ZAKU OUTRAGE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I would like to state my annoyance with your pathetic review of *Zaku* in issue 73 of **Retro Gamer**. This is a huge achievement by the Super Fighter Team and it's an amazing shooter in its own right, and yet you virtually hid it away at the bottom of the page as if you were embarrassed by it. While I don't really have a problem with the actual score you gave it, I do think you are doing the retro community

## STAR LETTER

# HOLY MOLY!

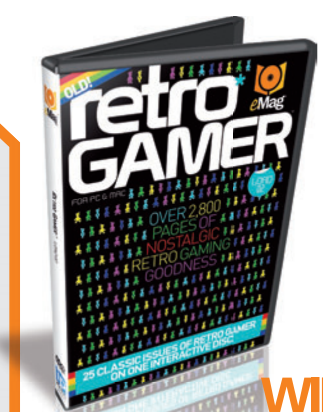


» Daniel Hardy found Monty Mole in his frying pan. What will you discover?

Hello to all you good folk at **Retro Gamer** Manor,
I'm not going to say anything profound or rant on about how much better the 16-bit days of old were; I just wanted to say I was doing the tedious chore of washing dishes when I noticed the wear and tear at the bottom of my frying pan looked almost like Gremlin's Monty Mole! I was just wondering if any of your other readers have noticed any other retro sprites popping up on everyday household objects?

Yours better-get-these-marigolds-offingly,
Daniel Hardy via email

**Well we've seen a Pac-Man crisp before, and Darran once saw Jack The Nipper in his porridge, but this is the first time that anyone has ever spotted Monty Mole. That's a keen eye you have there, and you've given us a great idea for a new competition. If anyone sees a videogame sprite in an everyday situation, then we'll give the printed ones something from the Retro Gamer cupboard. Here's a shiny new eMag to kick things off.**




## WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…




## CONTACT US

**Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

**Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

## >> YOUTUBE UPDATE



THIS MONTH, THE key focus point has been Atari Lynx games and Stuart's stag do. If you want to see just how good Atari's handheld was, or what Stu looks like in a pink fairy dress, then we suggest you head online as quickly as possible. **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz**

a grave disservice by not making a bigger deal of new homebrew releases when they come out. This is the first new Atari Lynx game in a while, and certainly the first with stunning presentation, and yet you hide it away like a dirty little secret. I'm incredibly disappointed about this and hope that you rectify this situation in later issues.

From a Zaku fan via email

**We don't understand where all this *Zaku* hate is coming from. We gave the game a full page of coverage in the previous issue and gave it a great score. Due to getting our hands on it late, we were unable to give it more space, but we did cover it in the retail section, because we know that some of our readers don't necessarily read the homebrew section and therefore would have missed it.**

**We're sorry that you didn't like the coverage, but at least we did cover it.**

## SIMPLE SIMONS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I realise that this may be out of topic now, but I would please, please, please like to appeal to you to ignore the numpties that were banging on about *Simon* not having a place in **Retro Gamer**. How they come to this conclusion is totally beyond me. *Simon* is a game *and* a retro game; the fact that you don't have to load it into a computer or console is completely irrelevant. It's like saying that Nintendo Game & Watch games have no place in your mag, and no one complained when you did that article… did they? What is the difference?

I would urge any readers who still feel that *Simon* has no place in **Retro Gamer** to seek urgent medical help. Counselling is very easy to find these days and I'm sure that your problem can be quickly resolved with professional help.

Here's looking forward to more similar articles, like the 3D Tomy games or those plastic Pocketeer games.

Kind regards,

Michael Winn

**Thanks for the support, Michael. The *Simon* article certainly caused a fair amount of controversy, but we still feel its inclusion was justified. We'll always look at covering videogames first and foremost, but it never hurts to mix things up a bit. And, let's face it, when you get the opportunity to talk to Ralph Baer you don't turn it down, especially when he offers to cook your breakfast.**

**With regards to your requests, it's definitely something we're looking into. The biggest problem with Electronic handhelds is finding anyone who was involved in them, as there's so little information about them. Interestingly, our director is a huge fan of Pocketeers and has nearly completed a full set. Maybe we could persuade him to feature them in Collector's Corner…**

## NO ROOM FOR GAME ROOM

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I would like to express my disappointment with this month's Game Room cover. It has absolutely nothing to do with old games, and, not having a 360, it had no interest at all to me. This is nothing more than **Retro Gamer** bending over for Microsoft and it disgusts me >>

> "Game Room has absolutely nothing to do with old games"

## RETROBATE PROFILE



| | |
|---|---|
| Name: | Marc Parker |
| Joined: | 5th Apr 2010 |
| Location: | Wigan, Lancs |
| Occupation: | Call Centre Monkey |
| Website: | Not given |
| Fave Games System: | PS2 for compilation and Cave goodness |



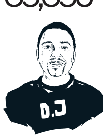

>> [360] While we sympathise with non-360 owners, Game Room has the potential to be amazing, and therefore earned itself a place in the mag. Worry not though, you're unlikely to see another Game room article any time soon.

## * BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles




High Score: 83,830




### DARRAN

**CHOSEN GAME:** U.N. SQUADRON

**Why I picked it:** It's a superb arcade blaster that sorts the men from the boys. **Handy advice:** Take out ground troops as quickly as possible; they can cause all sorts of trouble if you give them room to manoeuvre.




High Score: 34,630




### STUART

**CHOSEN GAME:** TIGER-HELI

**Why I picked it:** Loved this game as a nipper and decided to see if the old girl still had some game.

**Handy advice:** Be mindful of the enemies that appear from the base of the screen.



High Score: 56,560




### DAVID

**CHOSEN GAME:** PAC-MAN

**Why I picked it:** Okay, so not the most amazing of scores but it's my personal best and it does take a bit of resolve to play.

**Handy advice:** C'mon, you must know the game inside and out, but chew on the ghosts - that's satisfying.

# From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

## What's your favourite text/graphic adventure?

**Morkin**
*Urban Upstart* programmed by Pete Cooke. I absolutely loved it, and can actually remember being quite on edge whilst playing it. The inlay card text also set the mood of the game perfectly. "Scarthorpe is the sort of town where even the dogs carry flick knives! Where there's only one road in, and that's a one-way street!" Superb.

**SirClive**
*Hampstead* by Melbourne House. You start off in a smelly council flat in North London and have to climb the social ladder and get all the trappings of success (big car, posh wife, big house). As far away from 'real' adventure games as you can get, this was a real life simulator!

**woody.cool**
*The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy*… if only for the humour!

**ipmarks**
Definitely *The Hobbit* (although *Hitchhikers Guide* comes a close second). I remember being amazed as a child at how the other characters moved about and had a life of their own - even if Thorin did sing about gold a bit too much, and Gandalf kept taking things off you. Also, the sheer fun of wearing the invisibility ring and killing all the other characters was too tempting. If I remember rightly, once they were dead you could pick them up, leading to an INVENTORY of dead Thorin, dead Elrond etc. I still love that game (as my current profile pic co-incidentally shows).

**Dave300**
*Adventureland* on the Atari 8-bit and *The Pawn* on the Atari ST. I didn't complete either of them.

**bounty bob**
I loved *The Pawn* on the Atari 800XL, by Magnetic Scrolls on disk. It was the first adventure game I ever completed on my own without the help of my big brother or even my mother (yes, at the time, in her late Forties, addicted to text adventures, but she never new how to work the video recorder!).

**markopoloman**
I really don't enjoy reading so never got on with text adventures. But when *Kentilla* arrived for £1.99 from Mastertronic for the C64 it all changed! Thanks to Ron Hubbard throwing it some sublime music, I actually rather enjoyed it. Was about the only text adventure I really tried hard to complete. Never finished it though.

**Sputryk**
*Kobyashi Naru* on the Speccy, simply because it's the only text adventure I ever managed to complete.

**jdanddiet**
God, I'm so useless at text adventures that I rarely bothered playing them. One I remember playing a lot was *Sinbad and the Golden Ship* by Mastertronic, but I never got close to completing it.

**clarance**
Any Infocom text adventure really - I'm working through *Suspect* at the moment. Great atmosphere, a great 'Eighties' feel, and you've gotta love those feelies.

**Britnostalgic**
I loved *The Pawn* but *Questprobe: The Human Torch And The Thing* blew me away.

**Bub&Bob**
I will go for *Adventureland* for the Vic20, as it was the first one I ever played - have some of that, Iain Lee!

**fredghostmaster**
*Voodoo Castle* on the Vic 20 got me hooked on text adventures. I later loved *Terrormolinos* and *Knight Orc* on the Speccy.

**Antiriad2097**
*Bored of the Rings*. It hit the right spot between puzzles and humour, being just tough enough to frustrate but not insurmountable.Now available as part of the Zenobi collected works for a very reasonable sum: http://www.zenobi.co.uk.

**paranoid marvin**
Ooh, so many good ones already listed (especially *Hampstead*). *The Hobbit* was certainly groundbreaking. I think I'd choose *Denis Through The Drinking Glass* as the most memorable. Not the longest, most difficult or even most logical of adventures, it is a charming tale with text written in rhyme. As Denis, you have to evade the Iron Lady and escape from Number 10 - but with a twist; it ends if you don't find a drink every ten moves!

**yakmag**
*Lurking Horror* from Infocom on my Amiga. My first and only foray with an Infocom game; really atmospheric (although the sounds added a bit more tension). Although some of the puzzles were quite obscure…I never managed to finish it either… May have to dig it out again!

**Fred83**
*Quest For The Golden Eggcup* on C64.

**TwoHeadedBoy**
There was a *Dracula*-based one I had on the Spectrum… Couldn't get past the first sentence. That was fun.

**thevulture**
*Kentilla* C64. That Rob Hubbard soundtrack was enough to tempt me to try a genre i had bugger all interest in.

## YOUR OPINION PLEASE

### ZZAP! RATINGS

**Green Bert** I don't think I ever went out and bought a full priced game if it got a bad/mediocre *Zzap!64* rating. Did you buy a full-priced game even though it got a negative review in a mag you trusted?

**C=Style** Yes, back then I didn't have my own mind and fully trusted reviewers. A few times I ended up feeling disappointed. But *Zzap!64* and *Sinclair User* were my bibles as such.

**Mire Mare** *Zzap!* rarely got reviews wrong, so I did buy a lot of my games based on their opinions. Julian Rignall was particularly influential on my decisions to buy or not.

**Freestyler** I used to base my decisions on mag reviews, but then I started reading 'reviews' that were basically cut-and-pasted from a press release.

### PIT FIGHTER

**Fred83** Who doesn't actually mind this game? Who played it before in the arcade and in the PlayStation compilations?

**Ralph Milne's Left Foot** I like *Pit Fighter*. The ST version was good. I can remember putting hours into the demo that came with *The One* magazine. It may not be everyone's cup of tea – it is extremely limited – but I still enjoy it.

**RetroKingSimon** Me and some friends used to enjoy it on the MD around the time it came out, but I haven't played it since then, and, what with the vitriol its name garners these days, I'm scared to.

**crusto** I liked it. And the Mega Drive version for that matter. But I never got to play any other conversions.

### WORST GAME MUSIC?

**Graedient** I bought a bundle of Mega Drive games from eBay the other day and within that bundle was *Marble Madness*. I think it features is possibly the worst music I have EVER heard in a video game. Absolutely eardrum-drilling awfulness.

**nakamura** *Suikoden 3*, a very mixed soundtrack, but after the quality of the PSone games I was expecting better than this! It feels so cheap and nasty.

**Dam** It's a sound effect rather than a musical score, but the sound of your ship firing on *Raiden Trad* (both on the SNES and the Mega Drive) makes me completely unable to play the game. It goes through me like nails on a blackboard!

**TaxieDogg** Despite loving the actual game, I found most of the soundtrack of *Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance* on the GBA to be horrible. They really weren't kidding with that title.

## OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Street Fighter* sequel is the best?

Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike (DC)



Super Street Fighter IV (Xbox 360)



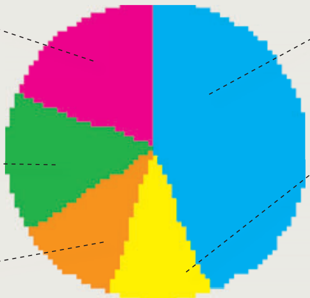
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**SpifferRabbit**
My vote went to *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* – *SSFIV* is just a graphical update.

**Steve Halfpenny Ver 2.0**
Don't make me choose! I just can't do it! That's like my children, man!

## HOT TOPIC

### Best Hewson Game




"Best for me is *Zynaps*, though I play *Uridium* more often as it's more iconic." **– antiriad2097**

"*Uridium*. The way the Manta class spaceship swooped and flipped around the screen mesmerised me. And the real sense of satisfaction felt whilst making a low level pass of the Dreadnaught as it imploded beneath you is very special." **– mire mare**

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because I thought you had more integrity than to sell out at the first available opportunity.

You would have never seen this happen in the days of Live Publishing and, if you continue putting money over the interests of your readership, then I'll have no option but to stop buying your magazine.

Yours disappointingly,
Matthew Lightbourne, via email

**Do you honestly think that a service dedicated to emulating classic games has no importance in a retro magazine? Or is it simply that you're unhappy with the coverage because it's on a system that you don't actually own, Matthew?**

**With Retro Gamer, we like to cover all aspects of retro gaming, regardless of what format it's on. Despite the initial hiccups that Game Room has had, we still think that it's going to be tremendously important to retro gamers and, as a result, we wanted to give it the coverage it deserved. We're certainly not bending over for anybody and we're actually quite offended that you'd think that. If we were promoting Natal then you'd have a point, but we can't help the fact that one of the most exciting things to happen to the retro scene since the Virtual Console is on a system you don't happen to own.**

## USA NOT OKAY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

As a US-based reader, I'd just like to say that I feel you're missing out on increasing your US readership by making your magazine far too UK-centric. I have absolutely no interest at all in reading about computers that I've never heard of, but I would love to read more about Atari consoles and early computers like the Apple II. I think you're really missing a trick by not dedicating more space to these machines, so it would be really great if you could change your current stance as soon as possible.

Steven Cutler, via email

> "Having John Romero guest edit Retro Gamer was an amazing idea"

### DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

**Stuart's Stag Do**

**The main discussion this issue has been about Stu's stag night. How we laughed as we remembered Stuart swapping his fairy outfit for a girl's Thunderbird costume (this all took place in the corner of a night club, and no, you can't see the pictures), everyone dressing up as Hobbits on Saturday night and his best mate Craig getting stuck on the water slide and having to shut it down for 15 minutes while staff got him out. Good times.**

**Thanks for the feedback, Steven. Retro Gamer is, first and foremost, a UK gaming magazine, so it's only right that most of our content will reflect that. However, we are fully aware that giving coverage to the systems you've mentioned can only be a good thing. With that in mind, we have new US freelancers, who will be covering US-related stuff in future issues. Upcoming articles include looks at the Atari 7800 and Lynx arcade conversions, and more on the Apple II as well.**




» **We're fully aware that Retro Gamer can do with more US-centric content. Worry not; expect this to change from next issue.**

## ROMERO RULES

Hi Darran,

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed issue 75. Having John Romero guest edit was an amazing idea, and seeing the little bits of information dotted about was fantastic.

The best bit was to come, though, with that magnificent In The Chair article. It was amazing, and it matched anything found in David Kushner's *Masters Of Doom* book.

I'm always amazed at how **Retro Gamer** can keep delivering wonderful articles.

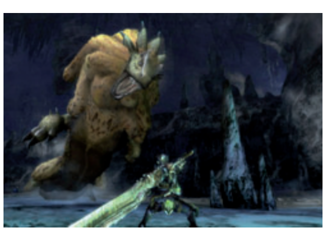
Will you be planning any more guest editors? I'd love to see Trip Hawkins, for example. He's been of huge importance to the industry and I'm sure he'd do a fantastic job.

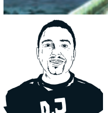
Many thanks.

Jake McKenzie, United States

**We're delighted to hear that you enjoyed the issue, Jake. We've had some great feedback from John himself and it was amazing to work with such an important figure within the industry. We're dead proud of how it all turned out, so fingers crossed for some equally big collaborations in the future.**

# CURRENTLY PLAYING

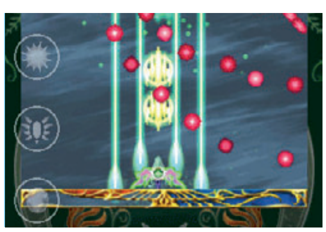





**DARRAN**

**Monster Hunter Tri**

Now that Capcom's first *Monster Hunter* game has hit the Wii, I've found myself playing nothing else. While the loss of the Gunblade is rather annoying, online play ensures I'll be putting plenty of hours into this.






**STUART**

**Espgaluda II**

This month I haven't been able to stop playing Cave's excellent *Espgaluda II* iPhone port. It's a jaw-dropping shooter and this great port does it justice and then some. I just wish I could beat Darran's high-score.






**DAVID**

**Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time**

Having thrown myself deep in to Prince's wonderful world, I thought it was time to have another bash at this classic. I picked it up at GameStation for £2.99 and it works well on the Xbox 360.

retro GAMER

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# NEXT ISSUE

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## Shenmue

In an exclusive new interview, Retro Gamer speaks with system programmer **Takeshi Hirai** about Sega's legendary Shenmue

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- He co-created the world's first third-party publisher and was behind some of Activision's greatest 2600 games, but how much do you know about David Crane?
- Magnetic Scrolls was responsible for some of the best graphic adventures ever made. Discover how the company was formed and what led to its sad demise.
- With the iconic Lara Croft set to return to our consoles very soon, join us as we explore her lengthy legacy and latest incarnation of gaming girl power.

# ENDGAME

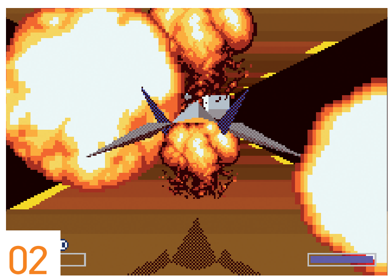



## STAR FOX

» From its story, Arwings and memorable characters, it's really no secret that Star Fox cribs quite a bit from Star Wars. The game is basically how Star Wars would have looked had it been directed by Shigeru Miyamoto instead of George Lucas. And cementing the parody is the game's memorable finale, which shares a piquant whiff with the rousing Death Star battle at the end of Lucas's space opera.


01

» Fox faces off against the maniacal monkey madman Andross. He defeats his first form, a giant polygonal head with asthma, but must finish the fight with a few blasts to his second: a box that floats around the screen and doesn't do much.


02

» With Andross defeated, the base starts to crumble. Fox remembers the mountainous collection of *Foxy Lady* magazine hidden away in his bedroom. He must make it out before he dies and the stash is discovered.


03

» But a potential crisis is averted thanks to some nifty piloting skills. He makes it out alive, lights up a stogie, and makes a pact never to go anywhere near risqué magazines again, promising to burn his collection the second he gets home.



04

» Fox sends a message to the Star Fox team, who have been flying around looking for a good pub to stop off for some eats while he does his lone gunman thing. Peppy recommends the New Red Lion Inn. The team agrees.



05

» The team sets off for some eats. "But where's Slippy?" asks Fox. "Was he shot down in the battle? Was he eaten by the French? Did he finally follow his dream of leaving Star Fox to break into the ringtone industry? Oh, there he is." Fin.